

**ASHLEE DOMINIQUE LENTA**

**TRIBES OF PHALO; TRIBES OF NONIBE: POLITICAL COMMUNITY  
AND AUDIENCE IN THE POETRY OF DAVID MANISI**

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of  
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### Abstract

David Manisi was a Xhosa imbongi (praise poet) whose public career spanned the apartheid era. In the early 1950s, he was the official poet to Chief Kaiser Mathanzima in rural Transkei. However, after he left Mathanzima's court in 1955 for political reasons, Manisi's career reflects the increasingly marginal position of the rural imbongi in the national context. This dissertation examines the archive of Manisi's izibongo (praise poetry), and argues that the poet's allegiances to the chieftaincy, to liberal multiculturalism and to black nationalism were rendered discordant with one another by the polarised national context. On the one hand, apartheid discourses appropriated terms and distorted institutions associated with the imbongi's art, which was consequently perceived as an uncritical endorsement of corrupt rural politics. On the other hand, the urban-led resistance struggle mobilised a counter-discourse of black unity that often explicitly rejected ethnic identities and rural politics.

Part One deals with written and oral texts produced by Manisi for Xhosa-speaking audiences. I examine the poet's innovative use of print media, and argue that Manisi responded to the increasing constraints on vernacular publication by crafting texts for future rather than immediate Xhosa readerships. Part One concludes by examining the poet's ambiguous performances at the official celebrations marking Transkei's 'independence' from South Africa.

Part Two investigates the body of poetry Manisi produced for academic audiences in South Africa and abroad. I argue that his predominantly white, English-speaking audiences frequently provoked Manisi. That he identified these audiences as descendants of colonials often prevented him from elaborating his vision of liberal multiculturalism. Manisi often retreated rhetorically into an exclusionary Xhosa identity based on claims to land that had been lost to colonials. I argue that the poet's intention of deploying his genre's healing political power in academic environments, was frustrated by the academic expectation of his performances and by discordances in his political ideals that were aggravated by the intercultural context of academic exchange and the polarised politics of apartheid.

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### **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this dissertation, including footnotes, does not exceed 100 000 words. This dissertation is my own work and is not substantially the same as any work I have submitted towards any other degree, diploma or qualification.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to Professor Graham Furniss, my supervisor, for his generous support, encouragement and advice. I am also indebted to Jeff Opland for providing me with access to the Opland Collection and answering my many enquiries.

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### Note on Genealogy

David Manisi was a Thembu imbongi<sup>1</sup>. The Thembu are a Xhosa-speaking group whose history is distinct from that of the main Xhosa line. Despite their distinct histories, however, as a response to colonial incursion, Xhosa-speaking people began to see themselves increasingly as constituting one nation, which is popularly, if not strictly correctly, known as the Xhosa nation. In its rural manifestation, this 'nation' exists locally as chiefdoms with their roots in pre-colonial groups such as the Thembu.

Manisi makes reference in his poetry to the ancestors of present-day Xhosa leaders from Thembu, Xhosa and other Xhosa-speaking lines, all of which in his conception form part of one Xhosa nation. His naming of any of these ancestors invokes, depending on the context, either the Xhosa nation as a whole or a specific chiefdom. The poet uses the appellation "Tribes of Phalo" to refer to the whole Xhosa nation as descendants of Phalo, a chief in the main Xhosa line. Manisi's poetry refers also to clans, such as the Hala, within these larger 'tribes' or 'nations'. According to Peires, "clans were kinship units in which the ordinary family homestead was the microcosm and the matrix of the clan as a whole." (1981a: 127). *Izibongo*, a literature of identity and connection, likewise represents its subjects both in the microcosm of their homesteads as well as in the matrices of their many larger affiliations.

#### Thembu lineages

Most of Manisi's local Transkeian subjects were Thembu. The Thembu migrated southwards into the area between the Umtata and Mbashe Rivers in the seventeenth century. The early chiefly line ran: Thembu, Bomoyi, Ndunakazi, Cedume, Toyi, Ntande, Mguthi, Nxeko. Nxeko had two sons in the Great House (the house from which paramount chiefs are drawn) and one in a non-paramount house.<sup>2</sup> The two Great-House sons, Dlomo and Hlanga, engaged in a succession dispute which Dlomo, the younger, won. Several groups broke away and formed their own Thembu chiefdoms, including the amaNdungwana, the amaTshatshu and the amaJumba. In the

<sup>1</sup> 'Imbongi' (plural: iimbongi) is the Xhosa word for 'praise poet'. 'Izibongo' (plural: 'izibongo') is the Xhosa word for 'praise poem', 'praise poems' and 'praise poetry'. These terms are used so frequently in this dissertation that they are not italicised.

<sup>2</sup> A chief married several wives. The Great Wife produced heirs in the Great House. The chief's offspring in other houses, the Right Hand House of which was a major house, were not direct heirs to his chieftaincy.

main Dlomo line, descent continued through Hala, Madiba, Taro, Zondwa, Ndaba and Ngubengcuka (also known as Vusani). Manisi frequently invokes these chiefs.

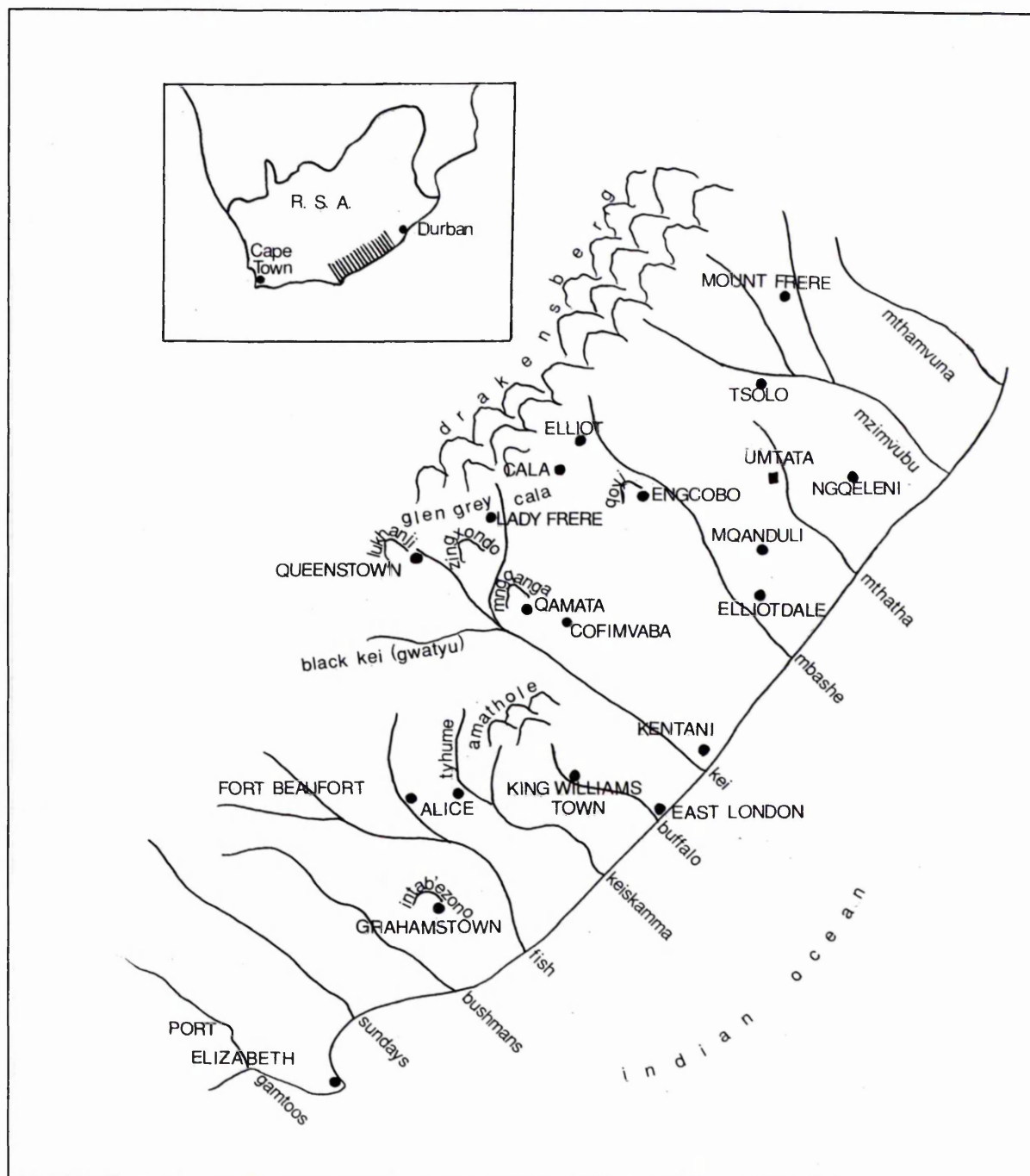
In 1828, Shaka expelled the Ngwane from his territory in what is today KwaZulu-Natal. The Ngwane invaded Thembu territory and Ngubengcuka, with colonial assistance, fought a successful battle against the invaders. However, the disturbances caused by the incident resulted in the secession from the main Thembu body of a group that became known as the Emigrant Thembu: the secession was led by Mathanzima of the Right Hand House of Mthikrakra, son of Ngubengcuka. The Emigrant Thembu took up residence in the area of Glen Grey and Cofimvaba, while the main Thembu line remained between the Umtata and Mbashe Rivers. The breakaway Thembu consisted of the Tshatshu led by Bawane, the Hala under Mathanzima, the Ndungwana, and the Gcina and the Qwathi, two non-Thembu groups who recognised the Thembu paramount.

Ngangelizwe succeeded Mthikrakra in the main line. Ngangelizwe was followed by: Dalindyebo, Sampu, Sabatha and Sabatha junior. This was the paramount line to which all Thembu, including the Emigrant Thembu, owed allegiance. In the Mathanzima line, which ruled in Emigrant Thembuland, Mathanzima was succeeded by: Mvuzo, Mhlobo and Kaiser Mathanzima. Other Thembu chiefs referred to in Manisi's poetry include Joyi, the second son of Ngubengcuka's Great House, and Mthikrakra, son of Silimela and cousin of Sabatha junior.

### **Brief note on the main Xhosa line**

In the main Xhosa chiefdom, the royal line begins with Tshawe in the 1600s, and descends through four generations in the course of which breakaways occur. Phalo, the son of Tshiwo in the main Tshawe line, had three sons, two of which (Gcaleka in the Great House and Rharhabe from the Right Hand House) split the Xhosa into two territories and chiefdoms. Gcaleka's descendants included: Khawuta, Hintsa and Sarhili. Rharhabe had two sons, Mlawu (his heir) and Ndlambe. When Mlawu died, his heir, Ngqika, was too young to assume the chieftaincy. Ndlambe ruled in his stead and refused to relinquish his power when Ngqika came of age. The Rharhabe thus split into the Ndlambe and the Ngqika, each chief ruling his own followers in different territories. Where other Xhosa rulers are mentioned in the poems I cite, brief footnotes will be supplied to gloss the poet's allusions.

# Map of Some of the Coordinates of Manisi's Life and Poetry<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> This map is an imprecise sketch of the region in the eastern Cape in which Manisi lived and on which his poetry centres. Transkei, the territory set aside first as a native reserve, then as a homeland and, in 1976, as an 'independent' nation, is bounded in the north by the Mthamvuna River, in the south by the Kei River, in the east by the Indian Ocean and in the west by the Drakensberg Mountains.

## Introduction

In an obscure volume of Xhosa izibongo entitled *Inguqu* ("A Return to the Attack"), written by David Manisi and published in 1954, there appears a poem addressed to Chief Rolihlahla Nelson Mandela, a young Thembu chief who would become South Africa's first democratically elected president forty years after Manisi wrote him into poetry. Part character summation, part prophecy and exhortation, Manisi's izibongo for Mandela precedes its subject's transformation into the major symbol around which anti-apartheid commitment would mobilise, and anticipates his future international significance. Although the poet identifies his subject as a royal chief, Manisi places Mandela in an African context of widespread upheaval, and praises him for his service to African groups within and beyond South African borders:

You've rendered services to Mbo and Nguni,  
to Sotho and Tswana,  
to Senzangakhona's Zulu,  
to Swazi and Ndebele,  
to Shona, Nyasa, Kalanga;<sup>1</sup>  
you've bridged nations great and small,  
forging African unity:  
all its nations are gripped in one birth pang. (71-72)<sup>2</sup>

As well as addressing Mandela with his traditional salutation, "Hail, Earth Tremor!", Manisi creates a new and prophetic name for his chief, "Gleaming Road", which predicts Mandela's future influence:

Hail, Mandela's gleaming road!  
Nations name you Earth Tremor;  
the poet names you Gleaming Road:  
you set Africa blazing ... (72)

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<sup>1</sup> The Mbo of Zaire, the Sotho of Lesotho and South Africa, the Tswana and Zulu of South Africa, the Swazi of Swaziland, the Ndebele of South Africa, the Ndebele and Shona of Zimbabwe, the Nyasa of Malawi and the Kalanga of Botswana are 'ethnic' groups. The Nguni comprises African groups that speak related languages; members include the Xhosa, the Swazi, and the Zulu (Senzangakhona was a Zulu king, and the father of Shaka).

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for poems and extracts from poems refer to their location in Opland 2005.

Manisi suggests no contradiction in honouring his subject as a Thembu chief who is destined to cast off the signs of custom in order to transcend his Thembu identity. The poet observes:

Piercing needle,  
handsome at Mthikrakra's<sup>3</sup> home,  
ochre-daubed torso,  
Mandela's son.  
Beads and loincloths become him,  
Though ochre becomes him he spurns it:  
If he'd used it, what might have happened? (72)

Beads, loincloths and ochre are the outward symbols of traditional identity and indicate participation in local codes and customs. Mandela is beautiful when adorned in the costume of his rural community, yet there is value in his refusing ochre, the sign of 'Red' identity whose wearers spurn outside groups.<sup>4</sup> However, although he has rejected an exclusive Thembu identity, Mandela's destiny is ordained and he is given authority by his Thembu birth, as the final stanza of the poem attests:

Speak out boldly, son of Zondwa<sup>5</sup>,  
uncowed by genets or wild cats!  
Even if death's in store,  
you've been prepared to serve  
as blood offering for blacks,  
for you're a royal prince.  
You were born to bear these trials and burdens,  
loads and loads stacked on loads.  
May the Lord bless you,  
grant you success  
in confronting the lackeys of evil.  
Let it be so, my chief. (73)

The plurality of circumstance, identity and choice represented by Mandela as a figure, and expressed in Manisi's poem, are mirrored in different ways by the poet's array of affiliations and beliefs. In the early 1950s, Manisi was both a member of the

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<sup>3</sup> See Note on Genealogy.

<sup>4</sup> Anthropologists have categorized Xhosa speakers into two "subcultures": 'Red' traditionalists and 'School' people (McAllister 1991: 130-131). School people accept Western education and Christianity, while Reds, who cover their bodies with red ochre, worship ancestors and reject Western influences. McAllister argues that very few Red communities remain intact today because of the insufficiency of land availability and the pressures of the migrant labour system (131).

<sup>5</sup> See Note of Xhosa Genealogy.

African National Congress (ANC) and the official imbongi of Kaiser Mathanzima, who was the chief of the Emigrant Thembu in Transkei. Manisi was a mission-educated Methodist, whose Christianity accommodated ancestral veneration. Throughout his poetry, he demands a single South African education system, but he also expresses his wariness of Western culture and his wish to preserve local Xhosa forms of knowledge. His poetry speaks of the need to bring the light of education and Christianity to dark corners of Africa, while at the same time providing anti-colonial histories that interpret missionary activity as having participated in colonial brutality against indigenous populations. Manisi was a proud guardian of the Xhosa language and of Thembu and Xhosa histories. He was also a pan-African dreamer inspired by the hope of widespread black solidarity. This dissertation examines the ways in which Manisi's archived izibongo reflect, resist and sometimes buckle beneath the strain of the identities and beliefs they expressed in the divisive and coercive contexts of apartheid South Africa.

### **David Livingstone Phakamile Yali-Manisi: *Imbongi Entsha***

David Livingstone Phakamile Yali-Manisi was born at Khundulu Location, in Western Thembuland, on 17 September 1926. He was a member of the amaNcotsho, historically a distinguished warrior clan who were spear-bearers to the prestigious amaHala chiefs. Like Nelson Mandela and Kaiser Mathanzima, Manisi was a Thembu, of which the amaNcotsho are a sub-group, and a member of the larger Xhosa-speaking collective. He was educated for short periods at Khundulu community school, Freemantle and Lovedale, a mission school from which he was expelled in 1948 for having participated in an aggressive praising contest with a boy from a rival clan. Manisi continued his education at Mathanzima Secondary School, but had to leave and find work to support his family when his father became ill. He always regretted his lack of further education, as his poetry attests, and supplemented his learning with a rigorous programme of reading in "English, Xhosa and History". It was "through this energetic reading", the poet writes in his 1983 autobiographical notes, "that I acquired vast information about my people's history and how she came to meet other peoples" (in Opland 2005: 18).

Between 1944 and 1945, before he was admitted to Lovedale, Manisi worked as a migrant labourer in the western Cape. After leaving Mathanzima Secondary

School, he worked for six months in the eastern Cape city of Port Elizabeth, one of South Africa's most important industrial centres. Between 1951 and 1958, when he was "dismissed for [his] political ideas", Manisi was a clerk in the Native Recruiting Corporation (Opland 2005: 18). In 1952 he had joined the ANC and in the late 1950s he was the secretary of the ANC branch in Queenstown. In 1960, the year in which the ANC and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned in South Africa, Manisi spent five months in an East London prison for his political involvement, but upon his release continued to work for the ANC until Queenstown authorities harassed him to the point that he felt compelled to return to the Khundulu valley. Shortly after his return home, Manisi attempted to attend a conference in Paarl but was again arrested and imprisoned for three days. In his autobiographical sketch, Manisi mentions nothing of his connection to the ANC and political activism. He claims that he spent the decade between 1958 and 1968 farming (Opland 2005: 18). In 1968, he returned to clerking, this time for the Hala Tribal Authority, which was headed by Chief Manzezulu Mthikrakra. Between 1974 and 1982, he was a clerk at the Labour and Lands offices in Lady Frere.

Between 1952 and 1983 – in which years he was, for varying periods, Mathanzima's imbongi, a migrant labourer, a farmer, a clerk, a political activist, and, as I shall shortly discuss, a fieldwork subject and university employee – Manisi was also a writer who published five original volumes of poetry. None of his books earned him money and all are now out of print. In the first part of his career, Manisi was widely acclaimed as a great poet. He rose to prominence at the age of twenty-one when, in 1947, he performed at the national Ntsikana Day celebrations<sup>6</sup> in Grahamstown. His performance greatly impressed his audience: the organizer of the celebrations, J.T. Arosi, accorded him the title *Imbongi Entsha* ("The new poet"), and invited him to perform at subsequent Ntsikana Day celebrations. Opland notes that Arosi's choice of title for Manisi sets the poet in a special literary lineage: he had inherited the mantle of the great Xhosa imbongi, S. E. K. Mqhayi (2005: 13). One poet-contemporary, St John Page Yako, wrote a poem about an early performance by Manisi:

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<sup>6</sup> Ntsikana was the famous nineteenth century Xhosa Christian prophet. He composed four hymns, one of which, the 'Great Hymn', is well known to many South Africans. Ntsikana played a significant role in his chief Nqgika's dealings with other Xhosa communities and with colonials. He introduced his followers to literacy and is famous for his exhortations to black unity and armament with weapons of spirituality. Ntsikana Day is an annual gathering of Xhosa people who regard the prophet as an important spiritual leader.



Hand Mqhayi's weapons to Manisi,  
poet to Mhlobo's Daliwonga.<sup>7</sup>

...

When this poet spoke in Grahamstown the sun paused to listen,  
the moon came out, Venus rushed back  
with the other stars, and all was ablaze. (Opland 2005: 14)

In the early part of his public career, Manisi earned the respect and recognition of his audiences and literary contemporaries, and was tacitly recognized as official imbongi to Chief Mathanzima.

In 1955, Manisi broke officially from Mathanzima, whose growing complicity with Pretoria was repugnant to the poet. However, Manisi continued to perform at events of public significance such as Mathanzima's reception of an honorary doctorate at Fort Hare University in 1974, and Transkei's 'Independence' celebrations at Umtata in 1976. In 1970, Manisi met Jeff Opland in the course of the scholar's fieldwork expeditions in Transkei. Between 1970 and 1976, Opland recorded several poems by Manisi in fieldwork conditions as well as in ceremonial contexts. In 1977, Opland arranged for Manisi to perform at the Grahamstown Performing Arts Festival, attended largely by English-speaking audiences. This was the first in a long series of what Opland and Manisi termed their 'lecture-demonstrations'. For five weeks in 1979, again through Opland's intervention, Manisi became the Traditional Artist in Residence at Rhodes University in Grahamstown where he performed for largely uncomprehending audiences with Opland present as lecturer and co-translator. Manisi's increasing involvement with the university led to his publication of an original volume of poetry and an epic poem under the auspices of the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Rhodes University, as part of the Institute's Xhosa Text Series.

Between 1982 and 1985, Manisi was a research officer at Rhodes where he continued to run 'lecture-demonstrations' with Opland. He also went into the field to gather primary material and interview informants, and undertook the work of transcribing and translating other poets' poetry. In this way, he gathered a first-hand understanding of some of the mediatory practices to which his own poetry was subjected for critical reading. The height of the academic part of his career came in

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<sup>7</sup> Daliwonga, which means "Maker of Majesty", was Mathanzima's traditional salutation. The line thus identifies Manisi as Mathanzima's poet.

1988 when he was a Fulbright Scholar at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. There he produced poetry for American audiences, again under the rubric that he and Opland had worked out for mediating performance to audiences unfamiliar with the language and form in which they were addressed. After returning to South Africa, Manisi performed before academic audiences for the last time in Durban at a conference on orality.

Despite the apparent variety of his employment record, Manisi was also frequently jobless, a casualty despite his talents of the apartheid system, and from 1988 until his death in September 1999, he was unemployed, ill, destitute and silent as a performer and writer. He never performed in the new South Africa. He never met Mandela. Despite the poet's unrelenting efforts to find audiences, Mandela never knew, before Manisi died, of the 1954 poem addressed to Earth Tremor, and Manisi's neighbours did not know whose gravesite Opland sought when he asked for directions to the burial place of the great imbongi who had lived among them. That Manisi died in total obscurity, no longer recognized as an imbongi in his own neighbourhood, suggests how far the poet's reputation had receded from its early swell.

Manisi's poetry was sensitive to the complexities of life in a country in which both he and his literary tradition were rooted. Although he desired peaceful co-existence in South Africa for all races, he was keenly aware of the historical injustices perpetrated against the Xhosa people, their political institutions and their land. In a remarkable 34-minute-long poem, performed at Opland's request, Manisi gives his account of the pre-colonial traverse and use of land by Xhosa-speaking communities, as well as the struggle over territory that followed colonial settlement and expansion in the Cape. He concludes by recounting the capture and removal to Robben Island of several important Xhosa chiefs who had defied colonial rule. This moment of colonial betrayal is the bedrock of Manisi's political understanding. Throughout his poetry he is concerned with the restoration of land and dignity to the Xhosa people. While the pain of colonial dispossession is evident in all of Manisi's poetry, the poet offers education as the key to black liberation and he is uncompromising before academic audiences about their obligation to supply funding and opportunity for black learning. Despite the power of his poetic claims, however, the trajectory of his career, from widely admired poet of his chief's court to little-known quasi-researcher, quasi-performer at academic institutions, suggests starkly the declining possibilities for his traditional address.

Manisi's poetry attests to his divided desires: on the one hand, he yearned for the impossible restoration of an obliterated, pre-colonial community and landscape, while on the other, he argued for the need of finding ways in which all South Africans could come to coexist equally and peaceably. In his poetry, these different impulses are expressed in Manisi's construction of his audiences as members of particular political communities. He frequently addressed his Xhosa listeners and invoked a wider Xhosa public with the name "Tribes of Phalo" – Phalo being one of the great Xhosa ancestors who ruled in pre-colonial times and who represents, in Manisi's revisionist understanding, Xhosa independence.<sup>8</sup> In performing for or referring to white audiences, Manisi spoke of "Tribes of Nonibe", a title that carries the burden of the poet's contradictory feelings about the multiracial national reality: Nonibe, the wife of a Ndlambe chief, was the daughter of a white woman who had been shipwrecked in the eighteenth century off the Pondoland coast. Out of loyalty to her mother, Nonibe offered protection to vulnerable white settlers (Opland 1998: 340, Mostert 1992: 683). In Manisi's construction, the whites he addresses are culpable for the historical injustices perpetrated against the Xhosa by their settler ancestors. At the same time, however, the Xhosa are no longer the independent nation of the poet's desire: they live in an irreversibly infiltrated landscape in which they too are responsible for the white presence. For Manisi, the moment at which dispossession, deprivation and division is born among Africans is that of colonisation.

This dissertation focuses on Manisi's public career in a study of the particular modes of address and textuality through which the poet laboured to communicate with his diverse audiences across the many cultural and linguistic divisions, geographies and political complexities of identity that define South African life. I shall argue that Manisi was committed to the political function of his art and sought always to appeal to his audiences, even when they could not understand the language of his poetry, as political agents who are duty-bound to restore equilibrium and justice to the polities of which they are constituents. I shall argue that, as a rural, Xhosa poet whose career spanned the apartheid period, Manisi performed and wrote in an increasingly polarised political context. On the one hand, the National Party (NP) government co-opted many of the imbongi's customary terms of address – those related to ethnicity, rural identity, chieftainship and tradition – by artificially bolstering the power of

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<sup>8</sup> When Phalo ruled, the Xhosa nation as Manisi articulates it did not exist. The Thembu, for example, were regarded as a completely different group from the Xhosa under Phalo.

chiefs and by proposing to 'free' rural geographies for black occupation and self-rule. On the other hand, the terms in which black resistance could legitimately be expressed were determined by the African nationalist liberation struggle, which increasingly eschewed the categories of 'non-white' identity that apartheid discourse had occupied and distorted, in favour of a revalorised, non-ethnic and inclusive black identity.

Poets like Manisi, who expressed local, rural and ethnic, as well as pan-Africanist and nationalist identities in a form that was associated with the rural chieftaincy and in a language that was defined by Pretoria as 'ethnic', could find few sympathetic audiences among black nationalists and few rural contexts in which their freedom to criticise wrong behaviour and politics was respected. Manisi nevertheless used every opportunity he received to address Xhosa and other audiences: he wrote newspaper and book poetry in the hope of projecting his words into the large world of print circulation; he addressed Transkeian gatherings in the hope of persuading Mathanzima to fulfil the promise of his early leadership; he accepted various terms of employment at universities in South Africa and the United States of America so that he could exhort privileged audiences to share their resources with destitute Africans.

I shall argue in this dissertation that Manisi demonstrated considerable ingenuity in addressing these audiences and that he exploited the capacities of different media and of the praise-poem genre to increase his chances of finding sympathetic publics. Nevertheless, the history of Manisi's career, after its early promise, is one of frustration and marginalisation. After 1955, Manisi's published poetry had no contemporary readership; after the mid-1950s, his Transkeian poetry compromised his political vision; and he was isolated by his later academic contexts, in which his English-speaking audiences provoked his anger and largely misunderstood his poetry. As a way of circumventing these failures, Manisi increasingly conceived of his poetry as a legacy that should be left to future publics; to this end he used the slim opportunities of book publication and academic enquiry to record his art as a durable product that could find new audiences in the future. The archive of his recorded and published poetry nevertheless reflects the difficulties Manisi faced in articulating his various loyalties, and testifies to the poet's experience of the constraints on his freedom of expression.

## **Praise poetry and the institution of the praise poet**

The institution of the praise poet, in its various forms throughout Africa, is widely recognised and respected<sup>9</sup>. What links distinctive traditions across the continent, such as Yoruba oriki, Sotho lithoko, and Zulu and Xhosa izibongo<sup>10</sup>, under the common rubric of a special and pervasive African form is their mode of addressing and naming their subjects with epithets that are compact and allusive, and that often hint at, rather than detail, relationships and incidents. Scholars agree that praise poets act as mediators who effect change by strengthening existing bonds and encouraging actions and attitudes based on values extrapolated from (reinvented) histories. The poetry itself is energetic, rousing and interspersed with bursts of dislocated narrative amidst epithet and metaphor. Each tradition of praise poetry has a distinctive style of performance: in the Zulu practice, for example, where considerable value is placed on memorising important izibongo for redeployment in new circumstances, recitation is fast-paced and breathtakingly impressive to the eye and the ear; in the spontaneous and improvisatory genre of Xhosa izibongo, the poet declaims more slowly and deliberately, in a gruff and growling voice. In both Zulu and Xhosa forms the traditional poet might brandish spears with which he pierces the air to punctuate his poetry, and is often dressed in skins that denote his clan association.

The Southern Africa praise poet has historically held a position of considerable political influence: inherent to his art is the licence to criticise with impunity those who come within his poetry's purview. Landeg White and Leroy Vail have argued that poetic licence constitutes the common basis on which all Southern African praise forms operate, whether they are traditionally orientated or popular adaptations (1991: 56-57). Although Vail and White contend that the licence is attached to the form and not to the performer, it seems more accurate to suggest that a performer cannot avail his poetry of the special political immunity dictated by

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<sup>9</sup> Early colonial descriptions, however, frequently caricatured and misunderstood the role of the imbongi. Likewise, uncomprehending foreign or local white audiences sometimes deride the praise poet. In apartheid South Africa, as this thesis argues, the rural imbongi lost the respect of many of his audiences and was castigated for his association with the rural polity by urban publics. However, the status of the institution of the imbongi is evidenced by the frequency with which urban resistance poets laid claim to the voice of the imbongi to express new allegiances.

<sup>10</sup> Influential work on African praise forms other than Xhosa izibongo includes: Barber (1991) on Yoruba oriki, Hodza and Fortune (1979) on Shona praise poetry, Damane and Sanders (1974) and Kunene (1971) on Sotho lithoko, Cope (1968) and Gunner (1984) on Zulu izibongo, and Schapera (1965) on Tswana praises.

convention unless he demonstrates his performance authority to the satisfaction of his audiences. The poet is always accountable both to the conventions of his form and to his audience, and so the most outspoken and valued praise poet creates for himself a reputation that is often widely proclaimed by his listeners.

Opland explains that the imbongi's political role is focused on social regulation: on the task of persuading his audiences to moderate excessive behaviour according to the norms reflected in the balancing world of his poetry (1983, 1998). In South Africa, the praise poet of the chiefdom is associated with the countryside – a rural hinterland in the imagination of politically dominant urban centres, and, for urban-based industry, a repository of latent labour supply. In their urban adaptations of the izibongo form for worker and, more recently, large-scale national gatherings, worker praise poets have laboured to shed their associations with the paradigm of the chiefdom, and have established through their poetry new 'communities' of relation (the proletariat, the multicultural nation) within which to mediate and encourage stability. In the mid-1980s, in what is now KwaZulu-Natal, trade union praise poets arose out of worker communities to mediate between unions and their ethnically heterogeneous labour constituencies (see Gunner 1986, Kromberg 1991, Sitas 1994). Although they used the rhythms, licences, naming functions and literary devices of rural izibongo, they explicitly eschewed connections to the traditional and to a politics based on heredity. They sought to establish themselves as popular exponents of a revamped, hybridised poetry that nevertheless carried the old aura of authority and legitimacy surrounding the traditional form.

Rural iimbongi – who from the onset of black urbanisation, travelled to cities to perform at events of significance to their rural communities, such as when a chief visited gatherings of his migrant-labourer constituents at their urban accommodation (Mafeje 1963, 1967) – have had to contend with many threats to the integrity and legitimacy of their rural polity since colonial settlement and, perhaps most acutely because of the pace and brutality of change, during the apartheid era. In his epic account of the frontier wars fought between the Xhosa and colonists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Noel Mostert argues that when the Xhosa encountered colonial expansion in the Cape, they “found themselves selected by history. Upon them fell the brunt of the experience of contact, violent or otherwise, with the outside world. It changed them forever, and set them quite apart in experience and outlook ...” (1992: 185). In Xhosa poetry from the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, which exists now either in transcription or as it was published in early Xhosa newspapers, it is clear that iimbongi were profoundly conscious of happenings in foreign nations, and of ways in which foreigners affected Xhosa-speaking communities.

Manisi's poetry, although it was produced during the apartheid era, focuses on the moment of colonial encounter, and refers repeatedly to settler communities: British, Boer, French and Germans. Crises inflicted upon rural paradigms by colonial and apartheid regimes are often juxtaposed in critical analysis, and indeed in many of Manisi's poems, by an oversimplified model of pre-colonial history and politics, which was in fact fraught with wars, dispossessions, and regroupings. These regroupings happened in a fairly fluid space of identity politics in which defections and immigrations were usual. It took the arrival of colonial modes of social and political organisation to delimit identity in more rigid ways, according to 'tribe', 'race' and geographical location across an evolving urban-rural divide. Terence Ranger has cautioned that what we tend to neglect in our evaluations of colonial and apartheid intervention in indigenous life is "the great disruption involved in drastically narrowing down the African religious, social and economic world while at the same time enlarging the administrative and political" (1996: 274).

The shape and composition of rural communities have thus been subject to considerable upheaval from pre-colonial times, but in order to deal with the rapidity and scale of change since the wars of colonial dispossession and the concomitant adaptations made by praise poets to their art, researchers have tended to portray the pre-colonial polity as stable and characterised by widespread consensus. What this dichotomy obscures, in addition to the historical realities I have discussed, is the daily content of life in pre-colonial communities. Although kinship ties connected groups, strangers and non-relations were always also present among familial communities. Kinship groups were not isolated units – they engaged constantly with one another and dignitaries from one group attended the significant events taking place at the Great Places<sup>11</sup> of both neighbouring and far-flung chiefdoms. What was important for some time before colonial occupation was the institution of chieftaincy: representing powerful ancestors, the figure of the hereditary chief provided many southern African polities with a shared political vocabulary and value system.

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<sup>11</sup> A chief's Great Place was the location of his main kraal. Significant community events and legal and administrative matters unfolded here.

Mostert explains that for the Xhosa, the chief “represented the principal force that embodied their communal life and held them together, namely veneration of their ancestors, as well as loyalty to and respect for the bloodlines that bound families, chiefdom and nation” (1992: 198). According to Hammond-Tooke, the chief was the

[s]upreme lawgiver and the head of the administrative system ... his court is the final court of appeal for the cases from local courts. He controls the wealth of the tribe and leads the army in war. He is, in fact, the symbol of tribal unity; in his person all the complex emotions which go to form the solidarity of the tribe are centred – he *is* the tribe. (1954:34, original emphasis)

Harvey Campion adds that the chief was “commander-in-chief, economic leader, high priest, chief medicine man and spokesman for his people” (1976: 77). These descriptions reveal why the chief was central both as leader and as institution to Xhosa politics and poetics. But chiefs did not have unlimited powers over their communities. Mostert shows that a chief’s constituents held him accountable to public feeling and custom in important ways (1992: 199). According to Mostert, “the dispersed and informal nature of Xhosa society and the lack of any central apparatus through which absolute power could be wielded” meant that the chief was never free to act as a tyrant (1992: 199). His court was presided over by powerful councillors whom he was bound by custom to consult on all matters of importance, and if he dared impose unilateral and unpopular measures, he faced desertion by members of his polity who could, and often did, defect to other chiefdoms. The pervasive ideal, popularly quoted and still in memory today, was that a chief was a chief by virtue of his people – as much as they vested their corporate identity and spirituality in him, so he depended on them for their loyalty and support.

In this political context, the praise poet’s art was one of the valuable means by which the polity’s dissatisfactions and demands could be communicated to the chief. The imbongi also transmitted the people’s great love for and respect of their leader and his ancestors. It is as this essential line of communication between people and chief, and as the mystical poet of connection between the living and the dead, that the imbongi enters scholarship. Historically, Xhosa iimbongi affirmed the institution of chieftaincy and strengthened the polity by invoking the grace and favour of the ancestors who were held to have powerful influence over the deeds and fates of the living. But the poet also addressed the chief in terms that confirmed his many



obligations to his ancestors and polity, so that the imbongi must be interpreted as a defender of the interests of the community as a whole. Opland provides a comprehensive and oft-quoted description of the poet's manifold function:

By constant reference in his izibongo to the chief's genealogy and history of the group, [the imbongi] not only acted as an ethnic history book but also moulded communal solidarity ... Herald, spokesman, mediator, historian, entertainer – all these were elements in the complex role of the imbongi in tribal life; overriding all was the peculiar ability of the good imbongi to arouse emotions in his audience, especially pride, loyalty and bravery. (1998: 17)

The imbongi does not focus exclusively on the identity of a leader and community, however. He may also cast an event or a practice of considerable importance as his major subject and comment on its significance to the gathering and the wider polity. For example, Melikaya Mbutuma, a contemporary of Manisi's, performed a series of poems at a public health meeting in 1976 extolling the value of good agricultural practices as well as of the breakfast cereal, Pronutro, which he praised for the range of nutrients it could provide to the poor. His poems included wide-ranging references to the audience, to the educators at the meeting, and to the various agents, including corrupt chiefs and government policies, responsible for the poverty and hunger that had caused the desperate need for such a gathering. Despite the usefulness of the idea of the imbongi as a mediator, the activity of izibongo is in fact far more energetic and multi-directional, concerned to ignite the heart and alight on the imagination with multiple suggestions of connection. All izibongo, including urban variants, spark with varied focus and address: in one performance the imbongi might call on leaders, ancestors, audience, broader polity, historical communities, imagined gatherings, foreign nations, star constellations, and God. The purpose is for any single addressee to see her/himself suddenly in one, and then another, and still another circle of identity, obligation and belonging so that something of the potential of community can be communicated and affirmed in the space of the poet's performance. Writing about Yoruba oriki, Karin Barber describes praise poems as constructing, through names and allusions, "paths that are kept open to allow the flow of beneficence between beings" (1991: 290).

One of the most important effects of the kind of address that defines praise poetry lies in the audience's re-imagination of itself in terms of historical and

potential identities, as well as in relation to other communities. It is this facet of the form that gives it both its affirmative potential and its transformative capacities. Rather than simply hinging on a contextual model of polity, then, praise poetry is defined by its intrinsically imaginative mode of plural address, and it is this mode of address that gives the form its applicability in altered circumstances. Anxieties about the future of praise poetry, contained in Archie Mafeje's seminal 1963 and 1967 articles, and in some of Liz Gunner, Jeff Opland, and Russell Kaschula's separate studies, range from questioning whether oral modes in general can survive the spread of literacy, to registering concern about whether apartheid censorship of poets and state co-optation of traditional structures of leadership and community will fatally transform or silence traditional *izibongo*. The foundational assumption of this dissertation is that it is not the form of the polity alone that nourishes the praise poet or threatens his art with extinction. Rather the praise form founders when, in a multicultural context, a polarised politics of oppression and its opposite (the dominant counter-discourse of resistance) narrows legitimate modes of address, and constrains the poet's ability to imagine and validate legitimate identities that fall between or beyond the binary in struggle. The essence of the form from pre-colonial times to the present is not its ability to decide unchanging identity but rather to accommodate the human complexity of connection and mutability.

### **Discourses of domination and the uses of 'tradition'**

In South Africa, the imposition of colonial claims to land and authority and of apartheid minority rule gave rise to vocabularies of identity and belonging that managed the black majority and legitimated white domination. John Sharp argues that the South African terms associated with group identity – tribe, race, ethnic group, tradition etc. – in fact “constitute a discourse about the nature of South African society, which reveals the logic and serves the interests of those who wield power. They form, in other words, a discourse of domination in South Africa” (1988a: 6). It is this coercive language of belonging and difference that explained the need for and the mode of apartheid segregation, and that was used to co-opt and corrupt rural institutions.

Sharp explains that the idea of the tribe was a colonial invention that failed to acknowledge the highly interrelated nature of African societies. On the one hand, the

idea that Africans were members of “neatly bounded ‘tribal’ or ‘traditional’ societies” allowed colonials to imagine that the world was arranged into groupings that were similar to, although considerably simpler than, European nation-states, and which consequently needed ‘civilising’ (Sharp 1988a: 4). The colonial construct of ‘tribe’, as Terence Ranger has shown, was internalised by indigenous people and applied to their societies so that Africans themselves ‘invented’ tribes as mirror images of the European idea (1983). As Sharp notes, “[t]his process, by which the representations of the dominators are assimilated by the dominated, and pressed into service in their dealings with the former ... is an important theme in the politics of [apartheid] South Africa” (1988a: 5).<sup>12</sup>

According to Peter Skalnik, the concept of ‘tribe’, which gave rise to related terms like ‘tribalism’ and ‘tribal’, enabled white South Africans to think of black people as being primitive, as belonging to distinct groups (although how to define these groups was always problematic), and as engaging in ‘tribal’ conflict as a consequence not of socio-political factors but of their tribal identities (1988: 68-69). ‘Tribe’ has, as Skalnik notes, “become a powerful idiom for [many black people’s] expression of political affiliation and difference” (1988: 69). Yet, the implication of ‘tribe’ in the apartheid lexicon – where for some time ‘tribe’ supplied the broad category of ‘race’ with manageable and exploitable subdivisions – has meant that many black people, especially urbanised blacks, strongly resisted the category. The prevalence of the category of ‘tribe’ in Manisi’s poetry of identity will already be clear from the title of this thesis. That the poet hoped to use ‘tribe’ in his poetry in a way that evaded its negative apartheid construction does not mean that his izibongo would be interpreted to fit his intention. In his autobiographical notes, Manisi responds to the idea that the Thembu were not historically members of the original Xhosa line by castigating those who “encourage the evil spirit of tribalism to crack and crush the black people’s unity for the achievement of their own unblessed ends” (in Opland 2005: 19-20). For Manisi, tribes were expressions of African pride and nodes of attachment to the local and the familial that enhanced rather than destroyed an overarching African identity. As Sharp notes, “[m]any Africans combine their interest in ... particularisms with a deep attachment to the cause of African nationalism” (1988b: 98). However, African claims to tribal identity had the effect,

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<sup>12</sup> See also Vail 1989.

according to the urban-based nationalist resistance, of supporting apartheid's divisive vocabulary and agenda.

In the 1950s, Sharp asserts, "the concepts of 'race' and 'tribe' were supplemented by a new vision of 'ethnic groups' and 'nations' as the basic building blocks of South Africa" (1988a: 7). Each ethnic group, the government claimed, was defined by its own language, culture, beliefs and tradition, and should develop as a group in its own territory. Ethnicity thus provided the 'moral' and 'scientific' basis for the apartheid strategy of 'divide-and-rule', and 'separate-but-equal' development. In its 1913 Land Act, the Union government had demarcated land for use as 'native reserves'. Sharp argues that "[t]he originality in the apartheid vision involved the idea that the reserves could be styled 'homelands' (subsequently 'nation states'), and that their populations were not merely 'tribes' but ethnic groups, which were proto-nations, and could be led through various stages of constitutional development towards the attainment of sovereign independence" (1988b: 91). Martin West has pointed out that legislation pertaining to ethnic identity and organisation created populations that did "not fit neatly with the national states created" for them: the Xhosa, for instance, were split across two homelands, the Ciskei and Transkei, and in Transkei, Sotho groups lived among the Xhosa (1988: 107). The 'impurity' and imprecision that actually attended apartheid ethnicity is evident from the categories according to which people were classified into groups: citizenship of Transkei was determined by birth, domicile, language, "being related to", "identified with", or "culturally or otherwise associated with" the Transkei nation.<sup>13</sup>

According to Mahmood Mamdani, "[a]s a form of rule, apartheid ... fractured the ranks of the ruled along a double divide: ethnic on the one hand, urban-rural on the other" (1997: 21). Rural homelands and rural leaders, in the form of chiefs, were central to the government's divide and rule strategy. Andrew Spiegel and Emile Boonzaier discuss apartheid's use of the term 'tradition' as a way of claiming the naturalness and authenticity of the rural nations they wished to create. Since colonial times, and the institution of the lexicon of 'tribe', the juxtaposition between 'traditional' African society and 'modern' European society had supported the notion that South Africa was a "society comprising two separate parts": a primitive black majority and a progressive, civilised white minority (1988: 42). The location of

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<sup>13</sup> The Status of Transkei Act of 1976.

‘tradition’ was the rural hinterland, which, since British colonial rule, had been governed by customary law, as administered by ‘tribal authorities’, rather than the European system of law, which governed urban society.

Spiegel and Boonzaier note that colonial annexation of Transkei between 1879 and 1894 led to the division of chiefdoms into districts presided over by white magistrates, and locations governed by local headmen (1988: 49). This system was intended to destroy the power of chiefs who had resisted and warred with colonial forces. The apartheid homeland policy sought to ‘revive’ the power of chiefs who would support Pretoria’s strategies. According to Streek and Wicksteed, this policy “transformed chiefs – theoretically at least the guardians of the interest of their people – into loyal, government-paid officials” (1981: 18). Although Pretoria claimed that the restoration of the chieftaincy was in line with ‘tradition’, government ethnologists were charged with the job of investigating genealogical claims made by those who applied to have their titles restored. If applicants proved pleasing to government, they were “inserted into the administrative hierarchy between location headmen and district magistrates” (Spiegel and Boonzaier 1988: 50).

The actual mechanisms of chiefly rule under apartheid were thus apartheid inventions rather than revivals of established custom. But just as “[t]raditionality’ had been a means of legitimating a racially discriminatory system, it now became a resource used by those Africans who stood to benefit from the apartheid system” (Spiegel and Boonzaier 1988: 50). It is this co-operation between government and government-appointed chiefs, both claiming the authority of ‘tradition’, that enraged and diminished praise poets like Manisi and his contemporary, Melikaya Mbutuma. Referring to Mathanzima’s elevation by Pretoria to an invented position of paramount chieftaincy over the true paramount, Sabatha, Mbutuma laments:

Kaiser’s lust for greed got us into this mess  
Why try to push the king off his perch?  
I piss myself at his powers to destroy us  
Damn him for destroying legitimate chieftainship.  
(Opland 1998: 274)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The lengthy poem from which this extract is taken, was recorded by Mafeje in March 1963, and appeared in Xhosa and English in Mafeje 1967 (205-211). I have preferred Opland’s translation here because it suggests the rhythm of the original better than Mafeje’s translation does.

The ideal of a chieftaincy mandated by and responsible to the rural polity existed in abstraction, at considerable distance from quotidian experience in rural areas. Manisi's efforts to articulate the values inherent in fair and 'traditional' chieftaincy were not only policed for their compliance with the prescribed apartheid interpretation of such terms, but were also burdened by apartheid's appropriation of the institution of chieftaincy and the discourses of 'tradition', 'tribe', 'ethnicity' and 'nation'.

Pretoria's strategy of granting independence to homelands enabled the apartheid vocabulary to absorb yet another term of resistance: 'decolonisation'. Government argued that in 'returning' land to black 'nations' it was participating in the process of returning to Africans what colonials had removed from them. Manisi's focus on the moment of colonial occupation, and his repeated calls for the return of land and institutions of self-rule that belong to the Xhosa by right and tradition, have force and validity when received on their own terms and in historical perspective. However, the rural poet's speech was vulnerable to the agenda of the dominant discourse of apartheid rule in two ways: first, it used the categories of identity and legitimacy that had been appropriated by Pretoria, and second, because the rural poet communicated these identities in his African mother-tongue, his speech appeared to support Pretoria's invention of language-based 'ethnicity'.

### **African nationalist and Africanist discourses**

The 1940s and 50s were formative years both in Manisi's life and in the history of the black struggle against segregation and apartheid. In the 1940s a group of young nationalists, among them, Mandela, formed the Congress Youth League (CYL) and began to influence the ANC leadership. Initially avowedly Africanist in their thinking, by the early 1950s Youth Leaguers had modified their position to accommodate class-based analysis (Lodge 1983: 37). In publicising the Defiance Campaign<sup>15</sup>, the Youth Leaguers employed some Africanist rhetoric: a Johannesburg CYL spokesman, for example, addressed his audience as "you who are young and whose blood is hot" and urged them to "catch the bull by its horns, Afrika" (Lodge 1983: 44). Most of the

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<sup>15</sup> The Defiance Campaign began on 26 June 1952 and involved the breaking of petty laws as a show of defiance against apartheid laws. The widespread resistance ended in 1953 because of the brutality and effectiveness of the state's response.

Defiance Campaign discourse, however, related to “sacrifice, martyrdom [and] the triumph of justice and truth” (Lodge 1983: 44).

In the eastern Cape, more people were arrested as a consequence of their involvement in the Defiance Campaign than in all the other provinces combined: 5941 out of a national total of 8326, according to Lodge (1983: 46). Lodge argues that support for the ANC was so sizeable in that province for several reasons, including: “the ethnic homogeneity of the local population; the deep historical roots of modern political culture”, and the persistence of strong anti-colonialism among people descended from the protagonists of first contact with Europeans (1983: 46-47). Manisi was typical of the ANC’s eastern Cape supporters in his sense of the history that supplied the black cause with moral legitimacy. The ANC’s rhetoric, especially in the 1950s, was conciliatory and sought to influence a segment of the white population by stressing the “moral impact of the African struggle” (Lodge 1983: 68). A conciliatory attitude and vision is evident in much of Manisi’s poetry, but also present in the poet’s historical emphasis is his dissatisfaction with the compromises attendant on negotiation and multicultural cohabitation. Manisi’s Africanist discourse bears similarities to that of the dissident Congress Africanists who in the 1950s abandoned the ANC to form the PAC. The PAC’s vision, Lodge argues, can be traced “back to an essentially peasant outlook” (1983: 83). For the PAC, the issue of the land and its return to black people was central. Pan-Africanists regarded South Africa as a colonial country that had to be retrieved on the battleground of race, rather than class, by Africans alone. Ethnic nationalism was their tool of resistance, and was to be the means by which South Africa took up her part in Africa’s common destiny.

The banning of African political parties in 1960, and the occurrence of the Sharpsville and Langa massacres in the same year, changed the political direction of black activism from protest to armed insurgency. The armed wings of the ANC and PAC engaged in sabotage attacks against strategic white targets. Poqo, the PAC militia, was the more violent actor and trafficked in the rhetoric of masculinity and anti-colonialism that frequently appears in Manisi’s izibongo. This is not to suggest, however, that Manisi was a PAC supporter, but rather that his poetry spoke in a plural discourse, aspects of which were popularised in the armed struggle in support of very different ideologies from those Manisi operated under. Indeed, Poqo condemned chiefs, and was anti-religious and highly authoritarian in the regions of its influence. Manisi, by contrast, followed the ANC discourses of Christianity and democracy, but,

unlike the ANC or the PAC, he also supported the ideal of chieftaincy and rejected violence in favour of negotiation. Lodge's account of black politics in South Africa suggests that, while organisations like the ANC often tried to harness and organise rural action, most rural resistance was highly localised. According to Colin Bundy, "[l]ocal and particularist 'traditional' or 'inherent' ideological currents flowed with – and sometimes flowed against – broader, more 'structured' or 'derived' beliefs and aims" (1987: 255). Bundy's account of rural protest in Transkei between 1920 and 1960 argues that the struggles of rural communities "were not, of course, waged by 'pure' peasant movements: there was a significant interplay between rural grievances shaping local resistance and the efforts of political organisations centred elsewhere to articulate, link and broaden these struggles" (1987: 255). Manisi's poetry, although it was concerned with the national question, was in part a localised response to the conditions of life in rural Transkei.

The poet's focus on equal education, for example, stems both from the crucial role learning had played in eastern Cape history, and from Manisi's outrage at apartheid's institution of Bantu Education in 1953, which brought into being a parallel and inferior system of education for 'non-whites'. The Xhosa were the first black South Africans to receive mission education, and qualification for the limited franchise that was granted until 1936 to a minority of black people according to the Cape liberal system depended in part on education. As Chapter One details, many of Manisi's literary predecessors received education of a high standard at Lovedale, and black inhabitants of the eastern Cape saw education as a primary means of social mobility. Lodge details the extent of the resistance shown by the Cape Teachers' Association (CATA) against Bantu Education, and argues that "teachers in rural communities during the 1950s were potentially the natural leaders of opposition to authority. ... it is no coincidence that the Bantu Education boycott movement [of 1955] had its most significant rural impact in the eastern Cape and adjoining reserves" where a premium had long been placed on education (1983: 119). Resistance to the government's Bantu Education scheme was widespread and, after the 1976 Soweto uprisings in which student marches were brutally put down by police, changed the course of black politics in South Africa. But Manisi's account of education, while it coincides with the national struggle against Bantu Education and is itself partly a response to Bantu Education, is best understood in the context of the historical Xhosa relationship to mission schooling. It is this context that explains something of the



poet's faith in proper education, and his repeated appeals to educated white benefactors to reform the education system. Manisi's concern with education echoes the old African elite's efforts to reform South Africa from within. Urban struggles led by students and pupils were more revolutionary in nature.

The university-student uprisings of the 1970s were influenced by the rise of the new, urban-based rhetoric of Black Consciousness (BC), which "washed over the boundaries of purely political concerns to infuse the patois of African petty-bourgeois culture with a fresh bitter assertiveness" (Lodge 1983: 324). BC discourse revitalised township literature in the 70s and demarcated the boundaries of an acceptable and authoritative language of resistance: although this language had much to say about the black man's emasculation in apartheid contexts, the black man was a black everyman who represented the combined African, Indian and Coloured South African community. Reference to ethnic difference was not legitimate. Catchphrases in the slick and brutal lexicon of urban-speak distinguished BC discourse as a language of the township and the city. As Lodge notes, the BC movement represents "the coming of age, despite the institutions of apartheid, of a new African petty bourgeoisie" (1983: 325).

As C. R. D. Halisi notes, BC philosophy, "by providing an alternative to psychological complicity with racial oppression, could expedite the subjective prerequisites needed for black liberation" (1997: 75). Urban black nationalists, whether they were "multiracial unionists" or "black republicans" (Halisi 1997: 62), perceived the need to refuse 'ethnic' categories and stress black unity as a way of resisting apartheid. Despite his many sojourns to cities for work, Manisi was to remain a peasant poet who was strongly attached both to the national cause and to the rural, Xhosa polity. In his poetry, which deals in the complex intersections of belonging and identity, Manisi could not banish 'ethnicity' or 'tribe' from his lexicon. This does not mean that his poetry was intentionally divisive: he exhorted black unity as fervently as urban black nationalists did. As I have argued, however, the rural imbongi of the chieftdom, whose literary heritage and terms of address were compromised by their association with the institutions and discourses that apartheid had co-opted, was a tainted creature in the eyes of his urban counterpart.

## Recent recuperations

This study, which focuses on the archival traces of Manisi's public career, is a response to several suggestions made by post-apartheid texts that have sought to recuperate marginalised literatures and revitalise the discourses of identity in South Africa. In his challenging study, *Southern African Literatures*, Michael Chapman argues for the centrality of the praise poem to a revised Southern African literary history. He argues that while the form is concerned with questions of power, it is also "about the insecurities and mobilities of change" (1996: 55), and that these latter subjects give us ways of 'reading' praise poems in contexts of struggle and transformation. Like Chapman, Duncan Brown investigates the way in which praise poems speak to present contexts even when they deal with historical relationships or when, as in the Zulu tradition, they are memorised sets of praises redeployed in contemporary circumstances (1998). Both Chapman and Brown focus on memorial traditions of poetry and perhaps pay overmuch attention to famous historical poems, like Shaka's izibongo, at the expense of more recent performance careers. Nevertheless, these commentators urge us to expand the study of praise poetry in the broad national literary domain so that South Africa's many literatures can be understood in relation to one another and to the social context as a whole. They argue more generally that the researcher has a duty to social justice, and that recuperative studies of neglected works, that might be valued for their alternative perspectives and modes of speaking, constitute valuable ways of promoting intercultural understanding.

Two popular texts have encouraged this study with their discussion of praise poetry in relation to questions about belonging and self in contemporary South Africa. The first of these is Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, in which the author recalls two performances of izibongo that remained in his memory and shaped his ideas about national and ethnic identities. His first experience of praise poetry was when the famous Xhosa imbongi, S. E. K. Mqhayi, performed at his school. Mandela describes his confused but powerful reaction to the intersecting identities articulated and endorsed by the great poet:

I did not want ever to stop applauding. I felt such intense pride at that point, not as an African, but as a Xhosa ... I was galvanised, but also

confused by Mqhayi's performance. He had moved from a more nationalistic, all-encompassing theme of African unity to a more parochial one addressed to the Xhosa people, of whom he was one ... In a sense, Mqhayi's shift in focus mirrored my own mind because I went back and forth between pride in myself as a Xhosa and a feeling of kinship with other Africans. (1994: 40)

What Mandela is struck by is the characteristic density and enigmatic nature of praise poetry. Later in the autobiography, he describes an occasion on which a Zulu imbongi recited Shaka's izibongo for an audience of political prisoners in a Johannesburg penitentiary:

Suddenly there were no Xhosas or Zulus, no Indians or Africans, no rightists or leftists, no religious or political leaders; we were all nationalists and patriots bound together by a love of our common history, our culture, our country and our people ... In that moment we felt the hand of the great past that made us what we are and the power of the great cause that linked us all together. (1994: 189)

These extracts suggest the ways in which praise poetry can inspire both narrow and broad allegiances.

Antjie Krog's memoir, *A Change of Tongue* (2003), is concerned with how an Afrikaans poet and journalist can learn to live and write poetry as a member of a multiracial and democratic South Africa. Concerned with translation as a way of living in multi-cultural, multi-lingual societies, and seeking out the voices and wisdoms of rural places, Krog devotes considerable attention to the figure of the praise poet. She also recounts a seminar she attended at which the lecturer performed an English translation of Manisi's 1954 poem for Mandela (2003: 180-181). Her subsequent meeting with the lecturer-performer, in which she hears about Mqhayi for the first time, is one of the ways in which she comes to understand more intimately the peoples and poetries of her native land. Mandela and Krog's texts suggest the importance of revaluing praise poetry as part of the national literature.

In his timeline of important South African literary moments, Chapman includes the publication of Manisi's first book in 1952. I consider my study a way of filling out this abbreviated insertion of Manisi's poetry in the national literature. In South Africa, oral poetry, and indeed this is true of Manisi's output, is usually dealt with by scholars from Departments of African Languages. In his review of critical work on apartheid politics, Mamdani identifies a ghettoized body of scholarship

concerned with chieftaincy and rural administration “whose findings and insights are seldom integrated into a comprehensive analysis of the state” (1997: 28). Similarly, Beinart and Bundy argue that the rural sphere has been misunderstood and marginalised in general South African histories to the detriment of a fuller understanding of the country’s intersecting communities and identities (1987). Disciplinary domains in South Africa have tended to emulate these unfortunate divisions: oral and folklore studies in African Language Departments have focused largely on rural forms, and literary and cultural studies, as embodied, for example, in Departments of English in South African universities, have given their energies to urban forms.

In Literary and Cultural Studies, scholars have given considerable attention to popular forms, as Barber urged critics to do in her seminal study of popular arts in Africa (1987). As I have suggested, popular forms flourished in townships in response to apartheid rule, and literary departments have for some time researched and taught hybrid forms like Soweto poetry, “Staffrider” and “Drum Magazine” stories, as well Trade Union praise poetry. But rural forms, even when they were performed for urban audiences as in Manisi’s career, were tainted for many literary critics by their ‘traditional’ status. In her recent review of Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl Ann Michael’s book about South African Cultural Studies, Barber summarizes the historical attitudes of such disciplines:

Throughout struggle against apartheid, cultural forms were recognised as weapons or sites of resistance, on the one hand, and as instruments of hegemonic control or sites of repression on the other. Cultural analysis under apartheid tended to be a sharply focused assessment of the extent to which each text or artefact promoted or retarded the liberation struggle. (2001: 178)

Just as urban, popular forms largely repudiated rural politics and terms of address because they had been appropriated by apartheid discourse, so literary studies often treated traditional forms as irrelevant or even detrimental to the liberation cause. More broadly, in some influential postcolonial theory like that produced by Homi Bhabha, traditionalism is figured as being uncritically patriotic and atavistic. Given credibility, Bhabha argues, “its language of archaic belonging marginalises the present” (1990: 317). Now that there is space for broader investigations than those allowed by the demands of the struggle period, the ‘traditional’ is threatened with

fresh forms of reification, such as the tourist industry's marketing strategy to sell 'authentic', 'indigenous' vacation geographies to local and foreign holidaymakers. In an interview with Paul Gready in 1995, Ari Sitas expressed his concern that in this context praise poetry is subject to simultaneous canonisation and reification. Gunner summarises the argument: "It is marginalized in the sense that it has lost its proactive role and its involvement in the making of a nation," but equally, it is being canonised "because it is seen as an important ingredient of what is perceived as exportable to the outside world as 'South African culture'. So the praise poet – like biltong and the protea – is part of the South African identity package" (1999: 58).

However, there are other contemporary engagements with the 'traditional' that give impetus to my study. The recently enacted bill on traditional leadership and governance,<sup>16</sup> for example, set out the roles and powers of chiefs in post-apartheid South Africa, and reflects state acknowledgement of the significance to the national paradigm of rural politics. And as I have indicated, recent literary projects such as those by Gunner and Gwala (1991), Chapman (1996) and Brown (1998), as well as public performances and popular publications that have been raising questions about rural and traditional influences, all make space for renewed evaluations of specific examples of the 'traditional'. I focus on the work of Chapman, Brown and Gunner because the directions they provide reflect their productive institutional orientation as scholars located in literary departments with strong interests in oral studies. If we are to take seriously marginalised forms and artists we must work to overcome not only how we think about the urban and the rural, the traditional and the popular, but also how we get past the unusually and unproductively fierce division of expertise and subject matter between literary studies and the broader constellation of anthropologists, linguists, African language disciplines and historians that comprise oral studies in South Africa. In international oral studies circles there has long been a call for an interdisciplinary approach to performance texts (e.g., Barber and de Moraes Farias 1989:1-11). But in South Africa the separation of disciplines has been particularly severe, in line with the kinds of political polarities I have been discussing.

This dissertation deals with the poetry of one oral poet. Whereas Literary Studies has traditionally seen value in careful attention to the individual artist, studies of oral texts have tended to produce explanations of genres, forms and their modes of

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<sup>16</sup> Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act, 2003 (Act no. 41 of 2003).

operation in society. The ascendancy of ethnographic, anthropological and sociological influences is evident in this approach. The relatively small sub-field of Xhosa oral poetry has been dominated by Opland's main studies, *Xhosa Oral Poetry* (1983) and *Xhosa Poets and Poetry* (1998). More recently, Russell Kaschula's *The Bones of the Ancestors are Shaking: Xhosa Oral Poetry in Context* (2002) has focused on post-apartheid izibongo. All of these texts investigate the practice and purpose of the form as a whole from the vantage point of original fieldwork. The products of fieldwork itself are sometimes published, such as in Kaschula and Matyumza's collection of Bongani Sitole's izibongo (2002), or they get lodged in libraries as archival material, much of which falls immediately silent.

While literary critics are no doubt overly conscious of the life of print, they can contribute usefully to oral studies by considering the potential of transcriptions. Brown, for example, argues for maintaining the dialectic between a text's "past significance" and its "present meaning" (1998: 2) – a strategy that commonly informs literary reading practices. In the context of an oral text, this dialectic involves interpreting performance as a phenomenon that acted in specific circumstances of production and reception and that accrues a new life and textuality, a new ontology, in print. In transcription, recorded texts address new publics and speak in ways that recall their oral context but are open to negotiation in their new circumstances of reception. It is this alternative world of interpretation for which Manisi hoped in his book writing and his address of the academic tape recorder.

There is a danger, however, in focusing questions about textuality solely on the categories of performance, transcription and linguistic translation. Even in the paradigm of performance, oral poems operate in fundamentally different ways depending on the conditions of their production and reception. In his 1964 guide for fieldworkers, Kenneth Goldstein suggested differences between natural contexts of performance in which artists address their 'normal' audiences, and degrees of artificiality in context where academics intervene to record or even precipitate circumstances for the production and recording of texts (80-82). Ruth Finnegan provides a more subtle account of the academic effect on context by interrogating the category of the 'natural': she argues that all social events and performances are constructed, and that tacit claims by researchers about their access to 'natural' contexts elide important questions about the intrusion of the fieldworker. She concludes, however, that, "there are clearly degrees of artificiality" (1992: 77). To

take examples from Manisi's archive, there are large differences between those poems performed for Opland at the scholar's request, those performed at political events at which Opland just happened to be present, and those performed in the course of joint teaching projects. These differences relate to questions about audience composition and capacity for understanding, performance purpose, and crucially, what modes of address are available to the poet. My sense of multiple oral textualities extends beyond the impact of the researcher alone.

### **Outline of the dissertation**

This thesis examines Manisi's recorded deployments of his literary form in a variety of contexts, all of them in different ways deeply inhospitable to free communication. I argue that, despite many obstacles, he always sought to communicate with his audiences. As well as focusing on the terms of address used by the poet to craft his appeals to his audiences, I shall examine the language used by Manisi and Opland to describe the texts they jointly recorded. I shall argue that the categories they applied to Manisi's izibongo do not adequately illuminate the poems' different textualities and the different ways in which they are affected by their broad political contexts of production. Based on the kinds of explanations and cautions provided by Goldstein and others, Opland and Manisi distinguished between 'performances' and 'demonstrations' of oral poetry.

'Performance' in this scheme denotes poems produced spontaneously at local, traditional events where audiences understood the language and conventions of the poem. The concept implies poetic efficacy and 'naturalness' of purpose. In the category of 'demonstration' falls all the poems produced as part of teaching seminars as well as those generated for fieldwork purposes at Opland's request. The term 'demonstration' suggests a kind of simulacrum: the form is being exhibited through texts that are not themselves efficacious or possessed of individuality. I shall argue that the distinction conditioned audience response to Manisi and fails to account for the poet's political agenda in addressing his listeners. In addition, the categories label performances in misleading ways: for example, Manisi's poems at Transkei's 'independence' celebrations are considered to be 'performances' because they unfolded in 'natural' contexts and were thus 'efficacious'. In fact, the 'independence'

poems are deeply compromised texts that bear the hallmarks of the inhospitable politics in which they operated.

On the question of 'natural' and 'unnatural' contexts, this study pays special attention to that which hampered Manisi's efforts to communicate with his audiences: political complexities, circumstances of censorship, and the difficulties in excavating terms and ideas from beneath their apartheid veneer. Manisi consciously tries to educate his listeners about the role he feels he must play as imbongi: a liar who tells lies truer than the truth. His frequent suggestions of the difficulty of speaking truth constitute the poet's way of problematizing his poetic form's very conventions. My interrogation of 'natural' and 'artificial' contexts goes to the heart of my understanding of Manisi's particular use of his traditional form in circumstances of extraordinary political and social complexity – the 'natural' and 'normal' were in short supply in apartheid South Africa. The approach to textuality and address I pursue in this thesis is committed to avoiding easy binaries between homogenous, rural, traditional communities of consensus and mutual understanding in which texts operate uniformly, and complex urban audiences for whom popular forms must constantly shift and renegotiate themselves in struggle with their conditions of production.

This dissertation relies on translated and transcribed texts. Manisi regarded himself as a guardian of his language, which he knew intimately and loved. Opland testifies to the extraordinary depth of Manisi's knowledge of Xhosa language by admitting that several of the expressions and words used by the poet were nowhere to be found in translation or official Xhosa dictionaries. The translations of Manisi's poems represent collaborations between poet and researcher: it was usual practice for Manisi and Opland to produce translations together in discussion, and, while Manisi was alive, Opland always presented a final version to the poet for his editing and approval. I have used the most recent versions of their joint translations wherever possible: these appear in Opland's account of his personal and working relationship with Manisi in *The Dassie and the Hunter: A South African Meeting* (2005). Where I discuss poems that Opland has not published, I have used translations that are housed, together with original transcriptions and sound recordings, in the Opland Collection.

As the rise in popularity and importance of Translation Studies suggests, the postcolonial world is one in which, if we are not exactly at ease with the contingency of our understanding of and access to difference, then we are at least bound to accept



these limitations and to make them meaningful as part of our intellectual and cultural transactions by working creatively and respectfully with the nodes of access available to us. Much work in the field of oral studies proceeds from an authority rooted in intimacy with the language in which subject-texts are produced – this is a formidable authority, which produces knowledge and insights of a particular kind. It is the indispensable tool of the kind of anthropology, ethnography and literary study conducted by leading scholars in Orality like Graham Furniss, Opland, Gunner and Barber. Brown's discussion of translation acknowledges the many limitations that attend reliance on translated texts but shows that this reliance can encourage a more detailed accounting for and analysis of the processes of mediation specific texts have undergone (1998). This dissertation is concerned with, for example, the political contexts that mediated Manisi's texts in their performance, as well as the categories of efficacy and naturalness applied to them. In approaching Manisi's poetry as one of the potential, future readers for whom he hoped in creating texts for the record, I work from Brown's assumption: that despite the "conceptual and ideological difficulties" translated texts raise, they remain "useful" in making available the political visions, aesthetic understandings, spiritual insights, symbolic identifications, economic imperatives, social pressures, and quotidian lived experiences of South African people in history" (1998: 14).

The dissertation is divided into two parts, each comprising three chapters. Part One deals with Manisi's written poetry as well as his performances at Transkei's 'independence' celebrations. These texts all apparently fall within the category of the 'natural' since they were produced in Xhosa for Xhosa audiences, with whom the poet intended to communicate according to shared literary and cultural conventions. Part One problematises the idea that the Xhosa imbongi had access during apartheid to 'natural' contexts of textual production. Part Two considers those of Manisi's poems that were produced for Opland's fieldwork and for university and school audiences, and that have been labelled 'demonstrations'. Chapters Four, Five and Six argue that, despite his frequent lack of success, Manisi tried to deploy the conventions of his form in alien and sometimes hostile environments so that an understanding of his university poetry as mere 'demonstration' undermines the poet's attempts at addressing his audiences.

In Part One, Chapters One and Two discuss Manisi's publication career. Chapter One outlines Manisi's Xhosa intellectual heritage and contextualises his

appeals to his audiences in terms of his contradictory attachments to Christianity, missionary education and literacy. I also discuss his writing career in the context of the diminishing opportunities available to poets who wished to publish in African languages, and argue that Manisi continued to write books despite his failure to reach audiences, in the hope of finding future readers. Chapter Two discusses the special adaptability of izibongo to print media and discusses several of Manisi's newspaper and book poems to show how the poet's conception of print media changed in response to his constraining political and publishing context.

Chapter Three focuses on Manisi's 'independence' poetry, performed on the occasion of Transkei's official 'independence' from South Africa in 1976. The chapter discusses in detail the demise of responsible chieftaincy, and interrogates the category of the 'natural' performance context. My analysis focuses on Manisi's three 'independence' performances as sites of untenable compromise that reveal the poet's inability to reconcile the overwhelming contradictions in his circumstances and political vision.

In Part Two, Chapter Four investigates the deployment of the category of the 'unnatural' performance and performance context in folklore and oral studies, and examines a selection of poems produced by Manisi specifically for Opland's fieldwork collection. I argue that Manisi was attracted to the idea of recording his poems as tangible objects that could testify to his talent and that might communicate valuable histories to future audiences. Chapter Five investigates the corpus of poetry produced by Manisi in the course of his employment at Rhodes University. I argue that this poetry evidences the strain of addressing white audiences who are complicit with perpetrators of the injustices on which Manisi's poetry unrelentingly focuses. While Manisi wished to encourage his audiences to provide education for black South Africans and to work for a just and democratic multiracial nation, his poems' angry focus on colonial histories often fails to see the people whom they address as anything other than descendants of colonials. In this way, although Manisi seeks to deploy his poetic conventions among academic audiences, there is an imbalance in the academic poetry that evidences the poet's struggle with his audience and his political vision of a desirable South Africa.

Chapter Six investigates the poetry produced by Manisi when he was a Fulbright scholar at Vassar College. There, Manisi faced perhaps his most complex political circumstances because of the attitudes of black ANC exiles, who assumed his

complicity with rural and apartheid politics. In America, he also faced his most 'alien' audiences: they were not bound to him, as his white South African audiences had been, by a common national problematic. In order to oblige his American audiences to his African cause, Manisi identifies himself in his poetry as a destitute African representative who has come before an undifferentiated nation of wealthy Western patrons to beg for aid. I argue that the oversimplified terms in which Manisi represented himself and his listeners are undermined by his poetry's proud subterranean Africanity and its hints at, but refusal to speak of, America's internal racism.

Part Two thus suggests the increasing difficulty Manisi experienced in deploying his art in academic contexts. Whereas he asserts significant control over his fieldwork products, many of his poems at Rhodes University are conflicted, and most of his American performances resort to irony, ambiguity and oversimplification as a way of coping with their context. The Conclusion assesses Manisi's many efforts to engage his immediate and potential audiences, and discusses both the extent to which his poetry remains afflicted by the binaried politics in which it was produced, and the ways in which his voice and exhortations might be re-valued in contemporary contexts.

## **PART ONE**

## Chapter One

### Politics, Black Intellectuals and Publishing in Xhosa: Manisi's Literary Inheritance and Writing Career

Manisi's public career began auspiciously in 1946 when he was invited to perform at one of the many celebrations organised to mark Ntsikana Day, an annual celebration of great significance to the Xhosa community of the eastern Cape. Such was the power of Manisi's contribution to the occasion that in 1947 he was asked by the Ntsikana Day Committee to produce poetry at the main national event in East London. What remains of Manisi's national debut is a sentence in an article published on 19 April 1947 in the Johannesburg newspaper, *Umteteli wa baNtu* ("The People's Spokesman"). Reporting on the main celebrations for dispersed Xhosa audiences, the article recounts the day's proceedings in some detail and recalls that, "[a]s we were closing Mr Livingstone Manesi (a poet) spoke about the celebration and he reminded us of Mqhayi" (In Opland 2005: 47). Until his death in 1945, S. E. K. Mqhayi had held the distinguished position of official Ntsikana Day poet, an honour bestowed upon Manisi in 1947 by his audiences and by published reports like that quoted above.

The young poet's early rise to prominence in the local popular imagination resulted in large measure from people's experience and discussion of his talent. Yet his reputation was created in print as well as in performance contexts, with the result that he was known as Mqhayi's successor beyond the confines of the local. After the 1947 *Umteteli* article, several newspaper reports of local events at which Manisi had performed augmented and circulated the poet's literary reputation in Transkei, Johannesburg and beyond. A favourable review of his talent also featured in the published poetry of a notable contemporary, the writer St John Page Yako. In a poem commemorating the 1951 unveiling of Mqhayi's tombstone, a public occasion attended by dignitaries and poets, Yako refers to the brilliance of Manisi's performance at the event and berates Xhosa intellectuals, like A. C. Jordan, for their absence and for having lost an opportunity to hear Manisi, the nation's newest talent:

Even Jordan of 'The Wrath of the Ancestors' has seen nothing  
Since he has not seen the edge of Manisi's hair,  
As he gestured and acted up as if to stab the heavens.

Even Mdlele hid himself at Lovedale  
 Fearing for his egg-head  
 Lest Manisi's dust should fall on and soil it. (In Kuse 1983: 143)

The newspaper reports and the extract from Yako's poem suggest something of the early acclaim won by Manisi. They also indicate the symbiotic relationship between print and oral media in the making of the young poet's reputation.

The medium of print in fact facilitated much of Manisi's experience of Xhosa literature, that which had been recorded from oral sources as well as texts written for publication. Repeatedly in interviews, Manisi cites Mqhayi as the greatest among poets and as his main literary inspiration, yet Manisi neither met Mqhayi, nor heard him perform except on record. It is certain that oral account was partly responsible for the widespread reputation attached to Mqhayi. However, Manisi's experience of Mqhayi's poetry was through print – he had read Mqhayi's books and poetry collections at Lovedale as part of his literature syllabus. Manisi's reception of Mqhayi's poetry through print suggests the mutually implicating ways in which literacy, oral genre, Christian and book education, as well as early black-nationalism operated in the young Manisi's consciousness. Born into a community in which mission education had been available to at least four generations of Xhosa intellectuals, Manisi experienced print as one way of accessing people and ideas – and even, paradoxically, oral genres.

From the start of his public career, Manisi wrote praise poetry for newspaper and book publication in addition to performing izibongo for local audiences. Between 1947 and 1955 he contributed several poems to *Umthunywa* ("The Messenger"), an Umtata newspaper, and *Umteteli wa baNtu* ("The People's Spokesman"), a newspaper published from Johannesburg by the Chamber of Mines. Both periodicals catered for mixed-language audiences with sections in English and Xhosa (and, in the case of *Umteteli*, other southern African languages as well). Except for one izibongo commemorating the death of a white Native Affairs administrator, which was published in Xhosa and English in *African Studies*, Manisi's poems were always published in his mother tongue, exclusively for Xhosa-speaking readers. The main subjects of his newspaper poetry between 1947 and 1955 were identical to those of his performance izibongo – most of them identified, encouraged support for, and exhorted right action from Mathanzima and Sabatha Dalindyebo, the Thembu paramount. In 1983, after a considerable period of silence in the pages of periodicals, Manisi's poem

mourning the death of the Xhosa academic Z. S. Qangule appeared in the longest running Xhosa newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu* ("Native Opinion").

In addition to his newspaper contributions, Manisi wrote original collections of poetry in Xhosa for book publication. Lovedale Press published his first volume, *Izibongo zeeNkosi zamaXhosa* ("The Praise Poems of Xhosa Chiefs"), in 1952. It comprises several sections, the first containing 35 traditional-style poems about Thembu, Gcaleka and Rharhabe chiefs. Other sections consist of stylistically diverse poems including lyrics, laments and narratives. The book would have been suitable for school prescription had it not been printed in the New Orthography which had been introduced in 1935: when the Revised Standard Orthography for Xhosa was adopted in 1955, *Izibongo zeeNkosi zamaXhosa* was not reprinted to reflect the change and became immediately redundant for school use. Since schools constituted the major market for books published in African languages, Manisi's first publication was fatally timed: upon its publication, the poet earned £25; no royalties ever accrued to him and the book rapidly sank into obscurity.

Manisi's second volume, *Inguqu* ("A Return to the Attack"), appeared in 1954. The author bore the £69 cost of its 500-copy print run. The book contains poetry in a range of forms, including narratives, praise poems and lyrics. The izibongo invoke a variety of subjects – from the chief, Mathanzima, to the poet, Mqhayi, to the political modernizer, Mandela. Although, like all Manisi's publications, *Inguqu* is unavailable for purchase and unobtainable except from a few archives, the poem for Mandela has begun to attract renewed attention and has been discussed and occasionally reprinted and retranslated in the pages of academic studies and in Krog's *A Change of Tongue* (2003: 180-181).

In 1977, the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at Rhodes University in Grahamstown published Manisi's thirty-nine-page long poem about Transkei's independence. Entitled *Inkululeko: uZimele-geqe eTranskayi* ("Freedom: Independence in Transkei"), the izibongo was inspired by the poet's performances at Transkei's 1976 'independence' celebrations and is dedicated to Mathanzima. Although as Opland notes, *Inkululeko* catalogues Transkei's socio-economic problems, refers to a wider African struggle, and cites Mandela as the kind of man needed to lead "experts and heroes/ and drive slavery out of Africa/ from the east to the west", it was to prove a source of shame for its author because it endorsed a political dispensation that was complicit with Pretoria's grand design (2005: 148).

Peter Mtuze argues that, although Manisi was not easily “hoodwinked into adopting a stand that [could not] benefit the blacks in the end”, in *Inkululeko*, the poet was “the mouthpiece of the Transkei authorities” (1991: 18). It is perhaps symbolic of the increasingly incommensurate loyalties held by the poet that his first South African and academic-funded publication should defend a political order he had sought to escape by taking up academic invitations to perform poetry.

ISER published Manisi’s next two books in its ISER Xhosa Text series: in 1980, a collection of poems called *Yaphum’ ingqina* (“Out Goes the Hunting Party”), which contains eleven izibongo in honour of contemporary chiefs, and in 1983 *Imfazwe kaMlanjeni* (“The War of Mlanjeni”), an epic about the 1850-1853 frontier war fought against colonials by the Xhosa resistance leader, Mlanjeni. In addition to these volumes, Manisi also wrote several unrealised manuscripts: one was lost by the publisher to whom it had been submitted without any copies held in reserve; another, called “iRhodes”, was presented to Opland in 1979 for his assessment but remained unpublished because of its ungainly form and minimal prospect of attracting a readership. “iRhodes” is housed as an unpublished manuscript in the Opland Collection and substantial extracts of the long izibongo have been quoted in *The Dassie*. The poem provides a fascinating insight into the kinds of compromises Manisi tried to make to realise his vision of multicultural harmony for South Africa.

This chapter investigates the circumstances in and influences under which Manisi produced his written izibongo. The history of the poet’s publishing career is one of struggle and apparent failure: his newspaper contributions, although they showed every sign of attracting readers’ approval, were few; none of his books sold well or was widely read, and none is now in print. In Chapter Two, I shall discuss the peculiar adaptability of the izibongo form to print media, and argue that, as his chances of reaching immediate adult readerships diminished, Manisi began to value, above its circulatory function, the capacity of print to preserve texts so that his poems might address future readers in more congenial times. In this chapter, I discuss the political, intellectual and publishing context in which Manisi’s writing career grew increasingly marginalized, and investigate the reasons for his continuing to write tenaciously despite the obstacles that prevented him from finding a contemporary adult readership. I outline the historically interconnected factors that influenced Manisi as a writer and that shaped the world in which he wrote his early books and newspaper poetry: Christianity, literacy, mission education, black education debates,



and the legacy of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Xhosa intellectual elites. The role of Christianity and the value of education were abiding concerns of Manisi's written and performance poetry, in which references to missionaries and book learning often betray the poet's deeply conflicted feelings about acculturation and the material legacies of the colonial encounter.

While the colonial occupation of Xhosa territory preoccupies much of Manisi's poetry and attracts his angriest criticism, it was the constraints of his contemporary vernacular publishing industry and the increasingly polarised national politics of racial discrimination and resistance that pressured his career as a publishing and performing praise poet. Born into a world in which Xhosa writers like Tiyo Soga, W. W. Gqoba, I. W. Wauchope, Nontsizi Mgqwetho, Mqhayi and many others had published considerable numbers of poems and been widely influential contributors to Xhosa newspapers, Manisi wished to add to intellectual exchange in Xhosa.<sup>1</sup> However, the relative political and publishing freedoms enjoyed by the Xhosa-speaking elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as its claim on adult reading publics and an engaged sphere of intellectual exchange, were rapidly receding when Manisi's writing career commenced. His early publications appeared at a time of paradigmatic change when large numbers of apartheid laws that intensified and entrenched racial segregation were quickly being passed. In the 1950s, apartheid's ideology of divisive ethnicity infused black education policy, was reflected in measures that constrained the vernacular publishing industry and caused the decline of African-language newspapers. Those of Manisi's contemporaries, like J. J. R. Jolobe, E. G. Sihele, F. B. Teka and St John Page Yako, who had made significant literary contributions to newspapers, ceased to publish in the popular press within the first decade of apartheid rule.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter and in Chapter Two, I shall argue in my discussion of Manisi's written poetry that the poet's hope of addressing broad political communities on a

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<sup>1</sup> Soga, Gqoba, Wauchope, Mgqwetho and Mqhayi's contributions to Xhosa literature are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Sihele, an imbongi, wrote "articles, gossip, letters, obituaries and poetry in *Imvo* 1928-40, in *Umteteli* 1931-52 and in *Umthunywa* 1947-51" (Opland 1998: 259). Jolobe, a writer and translator, had "poetry, travelogues, letters and a review in *Imvo* 1929-40, in *Umthunywa* 1942-52 and in *Umteteli* 1950-52" (Opland 1998: 258). Teka published "articles, letters and poetry in *Imvo* 1942-44, poetry in *Umthunywa* 1943-52, and poetry in *Umteteli* 1943-54" (Opland 1998: 260). Yako, whose poem referring to Manisi I discuss above, published "articles, reports and poetry in *Umthunywa* 1937-53 and also poetry in *Umteteli* 1950" (Opland 1998: 260).

range of subjects pertinent to black experience was frustrated by a political context in which, first, newspapers no longer hosted vigorous Xhosa intellectual and literary exchange as they had in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, second, publishers sought contributions solely for the publication of school textbooks, and third, resistance writers increasingly eschewed vernacular address in favour of publishing in urban contexts in the more widely accessible English medium, rejecting the rural polity as an anachronistic institution. In this chapter, I shall examine each of these areas (the Xhosa newspaper industry, book publishing and the rise of resistance literature) in turn, and outline the politics and perspectives of influential black writers who preceded and wrote contemporaneously with Manisi. I shall argue that the worldviews and literary opportunities that Manisi inherited were rapidly challenged by the apartheid context. Manisi's intellectual and spiritual heritage and the polarised politics of his age informed his contradictory attitudes to the act of writing and the subject of education, which throughout his career he both criticised as a political imposition and championed as the means to black liberation. It is to these attitudes that I shall turn at the end of this chapter in an exploration of several of Manisi's book and newspaper izibongo.

### **Early Xhosa intellectuals, debate and the newspaper**

Michael Cross usefully divides black politics in South Africa into three broad periods: "(1) Christian-liberal reformism and moderation, 1884-1943; (2) pragmatic nationalism and Africanism, 1943-1976; and (3) critical nationalism and Africanism, 1976-1986" (1992: 41). Although Manisi produced oral and written poetry between 1947 and 1988, a period that spans Cross's second and third phases, Christian liberalism, which was perhaps the greatest legacy of his mission education, significantly influenced his early poetry. Indeed, this early liberalism was to remain a marked strain in (and, increasingly, on) his poetry throughout his career. In the apartheid context, Manisi's efforts to tolerate and advance the multicultural national reality were constantly challenged by his strong commitment to Xhosa tradition and ritual, and by his underlying black nationalism. These allegiances, which he had inherited from early Xhosa intellectuals, were polarised by apartheid and the urban liberation struggle and are reflected as being in tension in Manisi's written and oral poetry.

African leaders of Cross's first phase were well-educated proto-nationalists who "made use of the mass media more extensively than the later nationalists" (Cross 1992: 43). A. C. Jordan, in his seminal account of Xhosa literature, charts the central importance to Xhosa intellectual and literary exchange of newspapers, a form which from the second half of the nineteenth century nurtured the most illustrious Xhosa writers, among them Tiyo Soga, W. B. Rubusana, J. T. Jabavu, and the greatest of them all, Mqhayi (1973: 37-42). Early mission-educated leaders, who were among the most prolific black writers, were strongly influenced by the liberal ideologies of their Christian educators. Many of the black intellectuals in the Cape Colony qualified for the franchise under the Cape liberal system. As I discussed in the Introduction, access to the black franchise depended on age, gender, property and literacy, and infrequently empowered black voters to install a person of colour into the Cape Legislative Assembly. Nevertheless, black intellectuals in the Cape felt that there was scope for their political advancement: many were engaged in politics, and many wrote essays for newspaper publication that contributed to public debates about political issues affecting black people. Opland's comprehensive account of Xhosa literature in newspapers details the long history of the periodical as a mode of exchange among the educated black elite since the arrival of mission education and, with it, literacy in southern Africa (1983: 194-233; 1998: 225-261).

These early intellectuals and leaders sought liberal reforms that broadened black opportunity in terms of existing structures, rather than large-scale change. The South African Native National Congress (SANNC), later to become the African National Congress (ANC), of which Manisi was an active member, was created in 1912 by members of the educated black elite who claimed Christianity and liberalism as part of African tradition. The SANNC's 1919 constitution mandated peaceful means of redress and included within the scope of the passive approach they advocated the use of education and literature to extend black interests. The influence of mission education on the Cape Xhosa elite was considerable. Most of them went to school at Lovedale in the Tyumie Valley. Hofmeyr points out that the Tyumie Valley, where the first mission station in the Cape was established, where Soga was born, and where Manisi went to school at Lovedale, was "the focus of the earliest mission endeavours in the African interior and the most heavily missionized spot on the inland subcontinent" (2004: 117). Lovedale established an educated, Xhosa literary community that shared reading and writing practices, and that regularly engaged in

debate and discussion in the context of the Lovedale Literary Society, which comprised staff and students.

Missionaries used education and literacy as tools of conversion – they believed that Western education would draw local populations away from uncivilised tribal affiliations. Literacy, they knew, was necessary to facilitate the ‘civilising’ education they brought and, more importantly, their converts’ personal engagements with the Bible. After Ntsikana, perhaps the most famous early Xhosa convert to Christianity was Tiyo Soga who became the first black person in southern Africa to receive a university education (which he pursued in Europe) and to be ordained as a minister (Chapman 1996: 107; Hofmeyr 2004: 118). Soga’s writings testify, according to Chapman, “to his utter involvement in the acculturation process” (1996: 107). As Michael Ashley records, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Cape Nguni had strenuously rejected missionary education, refusing to relinquish beliefs, identities and forms of polity to which they considered themselves bound by long and authoritative histories (1974: 201-203). However, after successive defeats against colonial forces in frontier wars, and when famine and defeat had settled on rural communities following the devastating cattle killing of 1857, that which had been solid – the chiefdom and the authority of the chief – seemed increasingly insubstantial and unstable. Many sought employment in colonial economies; others sought education in preparation for changing socio-economic futures, although the number of Xhosa who were schooled remained small.

The increasing attraction of mission education in the mid-1800s was accompanied by the rise of debates among white administrators and among black intellectuals about the purpose of black education in southern African colonies. The growth of the education debate parallels an increasing unease among many black intellectuals concerning their relationships to African and colonial worlds. Chapman argues that a sudden surge of racial discrimination following the annexation of Xhosa territory to the Cape Colony in 1877 meant that the position of accommodation between African and colonial worlds that had been adopted by Soga was no longer credible or desirable to all members of the educated elite. The Soga figure was represented in several colonial stories, Chapman asserts, as “the Christianised kaffir who, as the product of misguided notions of humanitarian integration, is left severely displaced” (1996: 109). Iimbongi of the time also began to appeal to their Xhosa audiences to unite as Africans, and expressed scorn for African Christians (Chapman

1996: 109). Chapman identifies the shift in late nineteenth century Xhosa literature “from Soga’s confidence in Christianity to a political consciousness concerning the need for education, organisation and unity” (1996: 109).

Following early missionary policy, one argument informing the black education debate that was to assume priority among black intellectuals and white government officials was for the education of a black elite along the lines of their European counterparts so that an educated stratum might lead and enlighten the masses in turn. (Indeed, as Beinart suggests, early African nationalists were uncertain about how they would incorporate the uneducated masses into their rather hazy vision of non-racialism (1994: 89)). Other white administrators advocated a strategy that was to find favour with apartheid governments in their Bantu Education scheme: the black population should be educated for their inevitable place in a labour force that would power white industry. Between these poles were other perspectives, each concerned with which segments of black communities should be educated, to what extent, with what species of syllabus, and to what end. The black education debate has been one of the most important, era-spanning issues in South African politics and race relations, and was a major subject of Manisi’s later poetry before academic audiences. The debate also shaped the context in which Manisi was provided with a brief education in the last days of the era of mission schooling, and in which he became a writer.

Although it was coercive in many respects, the education that was offered by mission institutions was incomparably superior to that provided by apartheid’s Bantu schools. Lovedale was concerned to engage students’ minds and shape their sensibilities by exposing them to European history, literature and music. Records of the discussions and debates that took place in the Lovedale Literary Society suggest that early black intellectuals were concerned with a range of questions. Lovedale teachers hoped that the Society would inculcate within its members a sense of literature as moral and ‘high’ art, and some critics have argued that the history of the forum provides “yet further evidence of the alienated black Englishness of the Lovedale elite” (Hofmeyr 2004: 124). Certainly, there were papers on subjects such as the battle of Waterloo, Cromwell’s place in English history, Wordsworth’s poetry, and the reign of various British monarchs (Hofmeyr 2004: 124). Yet, Hofmeyr shows that black students were equally immersed in local questions related to agriculture, education, gender roles, forms of government, modernity and ‘civilisation’, tradition

and custom, and “how to shape public opinion (pulpit and press)” (2004: 125). The range suggests the relative intellectual freedom enjoyed by the early elite.

The mix of issues dealt with by students also suggests their position between Xhosa and European tradition. Hofmeyr argues that the Literary Society,

[f]unctioned as one forum for defining the interests of this new African (and largely male) elite. This group occupied a complex social position between traditional chiefs, white missionaries, and rabidly racist settlers. In relation to chiefs, the elite stressed their modernity; in relation to missionaries, their knowledge of African tradition; and in relation to settlers, their superior claims to ‘civilisation’. (2004: 125)

Although some members of the elite were more Africanist than others, while others still were devoted to European ideals of refinement, the sense Hofmeyr gives us of their complex position is that all of them felt certain of their authority to express their worldviews to audiences which, they felt equally confident, would receive and respond to their statements and writings. Chiefs and traditional society, missionaries, and colonials – the triangle of orientation and address in which the early elite operated – had broken up into new, and even cruder political communities by the time Manisi assumed his position on the Xhosa literary scene.

In an essay entitled “Fighting with the Pen: The Appropriation of the Press by Early Xhosa Writers”, Opland discusses the late-nineteenth-century newspaper poetry of W. W. Gqoba and I. W. Wauchope. Both were educated at Lovedale where they were members of the Lovedale Literary Society. Gqoba became a member of the Native Education Association, which was established in 1879, and Wauchope was instrumental in forming *Imbumba Yamanyama*<sup>3</sup> in 1882. *Imbumba* was “one of the earliest political associations for blacks in South Africa” and was specifically opposed to the Afrikaner Bond (Opland 2003: 23). Gqoba became the editor of *Isigidimi samaXhosa* in 1888, where he encouraged and contributed to “an unprecedented efflorescence of literary and ethnographic” pieces (Opland 2003: 16). Wauchope was among the many contributors to Gqoba’s paper.

The subjects that the two poets wrote about suggest the influences on the early elite (mission education, the chieftdom, and colonial politics) discussed by Hofmeyr. Opland argues that, although Gqoba and Wauchope sometimes bow to the missionary

<sup>3</sup> *Imbumba yamanyama* is an expression that is associated with Ntsikana. It refers to unity in the image of a tightly compacted “ball of scrapings from tanned hide” (Chidester 1992: 49).



influence, they express a powerful Africanism that finds an outlet in the different literary strategies each developed. Gqoba's long poem "Great Debate on Education" was published in instalments in *Isigidimi*, and eventually ran to 1150 lines. Written in trochaic octosyllabics, the poem was indebted for its characters' allegorical titles to Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which was the second most important text (after the Bible) in mission education. The speakers in the poem present their various views on education, some in favour of the learning given to blacks and some vehemently opposed. Those opposed argue for a syllabus devoid of alien subjects and languages, like Latin, Hebrew and Greek (Opland 2003: 23). Opland argues that the debate format of the poem allow Gqoba to appear to privilege the final judgement that black education is sufficient as it is when in fact the body of the poem provides strong arguments against the arbiter's conclusion.

Across his writing, Wauchope often expressed contradictory beliefs. Sometimes he wrote of the need to eradicate barbarism among rural African people, claiming that customs like circumcision separated blacks from God and salvation. But he often defended Xhosa tradition and rural practices. Both he and Gqoba were strong supporters of the Xhosa prophet Ntsikana and urged political unity among black people. In a March 1884 edition of *Isigidimi*, Wauchope claims Ntsikana as his source of inspiration "and identifies education as the key to the national struggle" (Opland 2003: 25). Black unity, as exhorted by Ntsikana, and equal education, would be the basis of Manisi's political beliefs, but, unlike Wauchope and Gqoba, Manisi would find it difficult to reconcile the contradictions in his outlook because he could not rely on coherent and legitimate political communities or indeed immediate readerships. Wauchope and Gqoba, on the other hand, had a clear sense of their audiences: when they addressed Xhosa readers in Xhosa, Opland claims, they worked to instil in them a sense of "pride and faith in their own system of morality", and when they wrote in English for mixed audiences, they "spoke the language of their white missionary colleagues but introduced coded signals to their black colleagues" (2003: 27; 28).

Another member of the late nineteenth century black elite, and the editor of South Africa's first vernacular non-missionary newspaper, J. T. Jabavu, illustrates in his life and career the way in which the black education question and the influence of white control informed the modes and subjects of communication among the black literati of his day. *Imvo zabantsundu*, Jabavu's paper, first appeared in November 1884, and was funded by the Afrikaner Bond. Because of its Afrikaner backing, *Imvo*

was sympathetic to the Afrikaans position against the English, and was never free of white control despite its black editorship. Jabavu's ideas were in line with those of white liberal thinkers – he believed in a top-down system of education that would create an educated black elite. For the masses, he advocated a basic education, arguing that modernisation should be left in the hands of the highly educated minority. According to Cross, *Imvo* reflected its editor's politics of symbiotic “opposition and collaboration” in that it represented “perhaps the most moderate and even conservative section of the African petty bourgeoisie” (1992: 48). The paper was a prominent forum for the discussion of education policy, and came to be seen in 1916 as the official mouthpiece of the South African Native College at Fort Hare, a tertiary education institution created for black South Africans by a group of black intellectuals that included Jabavu.

*Imvo* was Euro-centric in its editorial policies concerning permissible literature and literary practice. Original poetry was frequently published in its pages, but the poetry was always in Western style. The izibongo that did appear in *Imvo* were historical, offered as monuments rather than as commentary, or as supporting evidence for historical articles. In 1897, a rival newspaper called *Izwi labantu* (“The Voice of the People”) set up business, again subject to white control that was personified in the figure of Cecil John Rhodes, the English entrepreneur and media magnate who backed the paper financially. While *Izwi* was progressive and political it was also sympathetic to the English position against that of the Afrikaners, so that in the textual rivalry between *Imvo* and *Izwi* there was also at play the opposition between different settler interests. Unlike *Imvo*, *Izwi* encouraged submissions of original, politically charged izibongo – one of its editors, the poet Mqhayi, contributed copious praise poems in response. Accordingly, Opland has characterised *Izwi* as a “rallying ground for the educated black elite” (1998: 243) – although the fact that the paper ran only until 1909, when it folded for financial reasons, suggests the serious institutional obstacles to black intellectual exchange.

The history of the late nineteenth century Xhosa newspaper industry reveals that white interests, whether missionary or entrepreneurial, influenced vernacular papers. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, these papers came to be managed by members of the educated black elite for the edification of and exchange between other members of a thin educated stratum. Readers were, by definition, educated and, despite alternative and circuitous modes of circulation such as reading



aloud to illiterate family members, newspapers targeted a slim segment of Xhosa speakers. Nevertheless, the newspaper medium hosted vigorous intellectual debate among educated Xhosa speakers and vitalised the Xhosa literary scene, which was in rapid decline when Manisi penned his first publications. Among these educated turn-of-the-century readers, there was fierce debate not only about education policy and politics but also about literary standards, forms and traditions. The kind of exchange I am referring to is well illustrated in an episode in the rivalry between *Imvo* and *Izwi* detailed by Opland.

On 20 November 1900, an *Imvo* poet, Jonas Ntsiko, published an 86-stanza attack against *Izwi*'s most prolific writer, Mqhayi, berating him for writing an izibongo "that criticised two prominent members of the community, that used strong language, and that plagiarised an izibongo by Chief Sarhili's imbongi" (Opland 1998: 244). According to Wandile Kuse, Ntsiko's poem was modelled on Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man" – each stanza comprising two rhyming couplets, each couplet being eight syllables long (1978: 20). That Ntsiko could identify Mqhayi's quotation of Sarhili's poet demonstrates his familiarity with the genre and products of praise poetry. However, Ntsiko does not consider izibongo an appropriate genre in which to write, nor does he deem the form's literary conventions to be operative in print, in which medium, he suggests, language and form must be proper, sentiment mild, and plagiarism deserves the "sound thrashing" he advocates as Mqhayi's punishment. Ntsiko's own quotation of Pope's style, a borrowing he does not acknowledge, suggests his corrective demonstration of an appropriate, educated form for print poetry. The episode suggests the divisions among black newspaper contributors about the merits of writing praise poems – the question was whether the form was sufficiently 'literary', 'educated' and able to conform to the conventions of print media. This does not mean that contributors like Ntsiko unequivocally supported colonials, even if they accepted colonial literary conventions. Chapman explains that black writers were growing increasingly disillusioned at the dawn of the twentieth century with the "European way". Ntsiko had objected to the pro-British sentiments of a newspaper to which he was a regular contributor, W. W. Gqoba's *Isigidimi samaXhosa*, demanding "that the editor hear the African view after Gqoba had rejected one of his articles as too hostile to the British" (Chapman 1996: 109).

As we have seen, the African elite of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "was partly forged in the colonial world and claimed a place in the colonial

order” (Beinart 1994: 85). Intellectuals like J. T. Jabavu increasingly came under attack for their lack of radicalism as the twentieth century entered its second decade. Chapman argues that “[i]n contrast to the Christian liberal ideal, a voice of nascent African nationalism began to manifest itself in the projects and writings of several of Jabavu’s contemporaries and rivals” (1996: 110). Chapman offers the work of Walter B. Rubusana as an example of the transition experienced by many Xhosa intellectuals. Rubusana had translated religious tracts into Xhosa and had been involved in revising the Xhosa translation of the Bible, but as the new black commitments of the early twentieth century became clearer, he “found his own Christian commitments increasingly secularised as he attempted to recover African tradition, history and political rights” (1996: 110). Rubusana produced his authoritative anthology of Xhosa proverbs and praise poems in 1906. Entitled *Zemk’iinkomo Magwalandini* (“there go your cattle, you cowards”), the volume contains recorded poems gathered from oral sources, reprints previously published texts, and publishes written poetry that had not been used by newspapers.<sup>4</sup>

Chapman argues that Xhosa writers like the later Rubusana introduced “a discourse of African nationalism” into twentieth century black literature (1996: 110). Beinart notes, however, that while “[a] growing sense of South Africanism among whites had its mirror image in an explicit attempt to create a more assertive African national identity”, “early African nationalists did not become strongly anti-imperial” (1994: 87, 89). These nationalists continued to believe in multiracial citizenship. According to Beinart, “[t]heir politics was born in the optimism imbued by partial incorporation in an imperial world; their political edge came from the shattering of that optimism” (1994: 89). Writers like Mqhayi reflect this acculturation as well as the shifting attitudes and responses to colonial imports and policies that Beinart suggests. Mqhayi published extensively in newspaper and book form, as well as performing to rapturous acclaim and enduring memory, as Mandela’s account of Mqhayi’s performance at his school demonstrates (1994: 47-50). Jordan describes Mqhayi as a popular figure with wide influence and literary significance as a “poet, novelist, historian, biographer, journalist, [and] translator” (1973: 104), and gives us a sense of the poet’s eagerness to exploit all available media to communicate: “Through the

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<sup>4</sup> In order to escape the publishing constraints of his local context, Rubusana provided funding for his book to be printed in London and engaged an agent to distribute copies in South Africa (Opland 2003: 13).

press, by public orations, and in private letters, he had a message of encouragement to give to the social leaders of his people" (1973: 105).

As editor and contributor, Mqhayi made his early print reputation in the pages of *Izwi labantu* and in *Imvo zabantsundu*. His novels include an adaptation of the biblical story Samson and Delilah, *uSamson* (1907), and *uDon Jado* (1929), an allegory that, Chapman asserts, "is meant to suggest Mqhayi's twin allegiances to the chief and the British king" (1996: 205). Mqhayi authored his autobiography in 1939, and translated into Xhosa, C. Kingsley Williams's *Aggrey of Africa*<sup>5</sup>. His most famous work, however, is the multi-styled book *Ityala Lamawele* (The Law Suit of the Twins) (1914), which "is influenced by the Christian precept of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* at the same time as it dramatises legal procedure among the Xhosa" (Chapman 1996: 205). Mqhayi also wrote many izibongo, one of which, *Umllekazi UHints*a, commemorates the assassination of Paramount Xhosa chief Hints. Arranged into eight cantos, the poem won the May Esther Bedford competition, and, according to Wandile Kuse, "sustains the viability of the oral techniques of praise poetry in the written form" (1983: 132). The poem was later republished by Lovedale Press, and is striking for its multiple modes of address to different South African audiences and to international publics, like the British. The poet also recorded two poems in a studio in 1932 or 1933 as part of a project aimed at recording traditional Bantu texts; Mqhayi's sound recordings were published in 1934 (Opland 1977).

The range and volume of Mqhayi's published output, when combined with his prolific performance career, supports Jordan's assertion that the poet's "contribution to Southern Bantu Literature is easily the largest and most valuable" (1973: 105).<sup>6</sup> Chapman argues that, "Mqhayi inherited an ancestral legacy of obligation to chiefs as well as two generations of Christian education" (1996: 205). He continued to support Christianity and liberal democracy even when he felt that Britain, in which he had invested considerable faith, had failed Africans in 1910 when the Union of South Africa was formed. The accommodation black writers found between African concepts like *ubuntu*, and Western imports like Christianity and liberal humanism

<sup>5</sup> Dr J. E. K. Aggrey was a West African who studied and taught in the United States. He visited South Africa in 1921 with the message that black and white South Africans should live in peace (Chapman 1996: 203).

<sup>6</sup> Mhlobo Jadedzweni argues that, during apartheid, critics ignored Mqhayi's literary significance, focusing instead on urban performance poets like Mzwakhe Mbuli and Lesego Rampolekeng (2001: 179-193).

enabled many of them to use Western discourses to bolster African claims to unity. In the early decades of the twentieth century, black writers became increasingly preoccupied with the question of how to unite and liberate black South Africans, and, as Chapman notes, their writing “became discernibly more Africanist” (1996: 203).

In 1921, the Johannesburg newspaper *Umteteli wa Bantu* was established by the Chamber of Mines. It would publish many hundreds of praise poems that, according to the long-established conventions of the oral form, explicitly discussed politics. The paper was established to mediate race relations in industry: in its bulletin of aims, published on 30 August 1924, *Umteteli* claimed “to preach racial amity ... to emphasize the obligations of blacks and whites to themselves and to each other ...” (Couzens 1985: 91-92). Although the paper eschewed criticism of the mining industry, it was liberal in orientation and opposed the colour bar in industry. It was staffed by black intellectuals, like H. I. E. Dhlomo, the influential Zulu poet, and gave considerable room to poetic expression. Among the paper’s regular contributors was the prolific woman poet, Nontsizi Mqgqwetho, who published Christian-orientated political izibongo exclusively in *Umteteli* between 1920 and 1926, and, after an unexplained hiatus, between 1928 and 1929. Opland has recently retrieved Mqgqwetho’s poetry from archival holdings of *Umteteli*, and his translations have been the subject of research by Duncan Brown (2004). Mqgqwetho championed *Umteteli* as an invaluable medium of expression for black writers – certainly, as a woman poet, Mqgqwetho was afforded by the paper a unique opportunity to ‘speak’ as an imbongi. As Brown remarks, “[i]mbongi have historically always been male, and an important aspect of Mqgqwetho’s adaptation of the form of izibongo in *Umteteli wa Bantu* is in claiming the right for herself as a woman to address and admonish her society as a praise poet” (2004: 4).

Mqgqwetho’s repeated calls for black unity were couched in Christian terms, but although the ANC shared her religious discourse, Mqgqwetho regarded the organisation and its organ, *Abantu Batho*, as being ineffective in their attempts to rally and unify black communities. Brown details the rivalry between *Umteteli* and *Abantu Batho* on this score, and indicates that several black intellectuals of the 1920s were embroiled in arguments over how best to organise and inspire black constituencies. Many of these debates took place in newspapers and were reflected in printed izibongo like those written by Mqgqwetho. In a 1920 poem, for example, Mqgqwetho accuses the ANC of sowing division, citing “rabble rousers” within the Congress who

“sermonise/ and grab headlines”. “And as a result” she goes on, “Natal Congress walked out,/ and Free State walked out,/ and there the Cape’s splinters splinter” (27/11/1920)<sup>7</sup>. The poet’s advice to her people is announced in a poem published in January 1924: “All black nations must merge,/ our only strength lies in unity:/ press on until you face each other,/ stop your bobbing and weaving” (26/1/1924).

Mgqwetho’s calls for black unity and her conviction that chieftainship was established and mandated by God foreshadow part of the agenda and worldview advanced by Manisi in his izibongo. Although Manisi read Mgqwetho with great pleasure and approval, he encountered her poems only after he had begun working with Opland, several decades after their publication – because of the ephemeral nature of newspapers and the generational gap between the two poets, Manisi never read Mgqwetho’s poetry when it was current. That Manisi’s poetry seems to reflect Mgqwetho’s in many ways suggests the strength of the Christian liberal, proto-nationalist intellectual tradition that Manisi inherited from his Lovedale education and to which Mgqwetho was constantly exposed in newspaper debate.

In addition to the poems he contributed to *Umteteli*, with its wide readership<sup>8</sup> and urban industrial base, Manisi sent several izibongo to the Umtata newspaper *Umthunywa*. Published in Xhosa and English sections, *Umthunywa* focused on local happenings and personalities in Transkei and East Griqualand. Whereas in *Umteteli* Manisi could address the South African context, the more parochial character of *Umthunywa* gave expression and audience to an enduring concern in his poetry with the local, with the landscapes and communities of home. Nevertheless, Manisi sent relatively little poetry to *Umteteli* and *Umthunywa*. When compared with the considerable and consistent publication of original izibongo in periodicals by poets like Mqhayi and Mgqwetho, Manisi’s contribution seems unremarkable, or perhaps surprising in view of his seriousness and tenacity as a publishing poet. As my earlier resume of his published poetry suggests, Manisi seems to have decided in 1955, the year in which he officially broke from Mathanzima, to write poetry solely for book publication, whatever the considerable obstacles to such ambition. There are several related reasons why Manisi chose such a course.

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<sup>7</sup> Mgqwetho’s poetry is referenced according to its date of publication, which corresponds to its catalogue details in the Opland collection.

<sup>8</sup> In June 1939, the paper claimed “the biggest reading public in Africa” (24 June 1939, quoted in Opland 1998: 252).

Les and Donna Switzer argue that the 1948 election, which brought the NP to power, “was the beginning of the end for the protest journals”, which, together with the rest of the Black Press, came to be “supervised at every level by whites” (1979: 11). The entrenchment of Bantu Education in 1953 legislation ended missionary control of newspapers and placed papers like *Imvo* under Tanda Pers, a subsidiary of Afrikaanse Pers, the government’s press. Under such conditions, Opland argues, “Xhosa readers no longer felt inclined to contribute literature in any great quantities to newspapers” (1998: 261). In summing up the value of the early Xhosa newspaper industry, Opland suggests the scale of the loss suffered by the Xhosa writers of the 1950s who could no longer rely on the newspaper as a forum for adult exchange:

[Newspapers] brought Xhosa literature to maturity at the turn of the century before Xhosa books had appeared on any large scale. Newspaper bridged the gap between oral and written modes, created a literary community, and provided material for many books by most of the major Xhosa authors and editors. The work of many of the major Xhosa authors can be found only in newspapers. And above all, it is only in newspapers that we can find, for a time, free literary expression produced by adults for adult readers. (1998: 261)

Manisi wrote adult and political poetry and always sought, although infrequently found, an adult readership. The decline of the Xhosa newspaper industry and its cooption by the government’s agenda discouraged Manisi from sending further poetry to newspaper editors. He no longer felt that he was part of a national, Xhosa literary community.

Some papers, like *Umtshunywa*, which was published in Umtata, continued to solicit literary contributions. Yet, as far as we know, Manisi sent no further izibongo to his local broadsheet. His early newspaper poetry was concerned with local Transkeian figures like Mathanzima and Sabatha. Manisi’s retreat from local newspaper publication can also be interpreted as comprising part of his withdrawal as Mathanzima’s imbongi. The newspaper is public, political property that circulates among contemporary audiences. Since izibongo is a correspondingly urgent political form, it is difficult to see how Manisi could have withdrawn from Transkei politics without foregoing newspaper publication, unless he adopted a public position against Mathanzima. As Manisi’s frequent returns to Mathanzima’s court suggest, despite his disapproval of his chief’s policies and complicities, his feeling on the subject of

loyalty was highly fraught and he may not have wanted to submit his personal conflict to public scrutiny.

Manisi's self-distancing from Mathanzima must be understood in the context of the new political phase in South Africa in which apartheid's cornerstones, including Bantu education, were being laid. As I discussed in the Introduction, geographical segregation depended on the government's purchase of support from chiefs in rural areas, where homelands were to be established. Manisi's growing sense of Mathanzima's complicity with Pretoria placed the poet in a difficult position – his deep sense of responsibility to the area and community of his birth, and his commitment to Mathanzima were premised on rooted beliefs: first, that chieftaincy represented and embodied the wealth and well-being of the chiefdom, and second, that Mathanzima had been blessed with great promise and was capable of returning to the interests of his people. That his belief in Mathanzima seemed in 1955 to be in prospect of profound disappointment never diminished Manisi's foundational faith in the institution of traditional leadership. 1955 must be understood, then, as a crisis point in the young poet's literary career, the first of many such moments when beliefs that had once seemed easily compatible were suddenly incongruent. Manisi's silence in immediate media suggests his difficulty in finding an appropriate public stance that could accommodate criticism of an unfolding partnership between chiefs and apartheid's architects while still honouring the institution of chieftaincy. It also suggests his intellectual isolation – suddenly there was no immediate newspaper public from which he could seek support and reply.

### **The vernacular press, Bantu education and resistance literature**

The Lovedale press, which was part of the Lovedale Mission, was largely responsible for stimulating and enabling Xhosa book publication in the early nineteenth century, when its primary task was to provide copies of the translated Bible and related Xhosa texts to its converts. In her fascinating study of the ways in which translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress* entered into and helped create African public spheres, Hofmeyr discusses Soga's Xhosa translation of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. *Uhambo lo Mhambi*, published in 1868, comprises a translation of the first part of Bunyan's book. The second part was translated by Soga's son, John Henderson Soga, and published in

1929. Hofmeyr argues that, “students entering Lovedale were ... to encounter an environment that was Bunyan saturated and they were to meet him in both Xhosa and English in an array of forums” (2004: 120). Hofmeyr shows how, at the height of its influence between the 1870s and the 1940s (a period that includes Manisi’s education), Bunyan’s text “informed the political discussion of the elite and provided a set of metaphors for debating questions of how to fashion an African modernity” (2004: 135).

In addition to European religious texts, however, Lovedale Press was also interested in promoting Xhosa narrative and poetry as supports for literacy and a ‘civilised’ literature. The published products had to conform to missionary imperatives. Opland explains that at the turn of the nineteenth century, writers like Mqhayi were constrained by the press’s intervention against what it perceived as evidence in submissions of the overly traditional and tribal. Missionary censorship was, however, inconsistently applied, so that A. C. Jordan, for example, was allowed free range in his writing, whereas several manuscripts submitted by Mqhayi were rejected and are consequently lost to the world (Opland 1984: 183). According to Peires, Lovedale refused submissions that were critical of the British or of missionaries; that highlighted ethnic differences; or that commented contentiously on contemporary politics (Peires 1980: 82). Lovedale was nevertheless a prolific publisher of Xhosa writers but, as Opland points out, the press had to concern itself increasingly with commercial realities and could not afford to publish books that had no reasonable prospect of selling (1984: 184/185). One of the certain and expanding markets for book consumption was schools, and publication requirements accordingly came to be shaped increasingly by the demands of schools for text books and school readers.

Peires shows how the demands of the school market affected the publication of Mqhayi’s classic *Ityala lamawele*. Lovedale wished to publish an abridged version for school prescription, in the service of which much detail essential to Mqhayi’s historical and political focus would have to be excised. Mqhayi agreed to the expurgated version on condition that the original version should be printed in addition. According to Peires, Mqhayi’s preface in the original version was “addressed to chiefs, councillors, ladies and gentlemen and boasts that it contains the ‘essence’ of Xhosa writing” (1980: 79). The school version addressed itself to pupils, the government, the Department of Education (which Mqhayi thanked for the



version's school circulation) and the Department of Justice (which was thanked by the poet for its use of his text "in Xhosa-language examinations for magistrates") (Peires 1980: 79). For Mqhayi, it seems, the original version of his book contained his intended message and legacy to the men and women of his community. The abridged school version, addressed to school and government officials, was a compromise in the service of revenue, as well as textual circulation and use. This divorce between authorial meaning and intended address on the one hand, and circulation and reception on the other, supplies a telling example of the constraints upon twentieth century Xhosa writers.

In its 1953 Bantu Education Act, the NP government ordained an education system for blacks that Manisi describes in his performance at Harvard in 1988 as being "impoverished./ It's intended for idiots and cretins" (306). Syllabi privileging the teaching of practical skills were devised to prepare black children for their subordinate place in the labour market. The medium of black education was to be primarily the majority local African language. Chapman summarises the effect of the system:

Bantu Education eroded the mission schools, spread 'vernacular' and 'ethnic' education widely but thinly and, in its philosophy, reinforced the design of apartheid according to which the different African ethnic groups were regarded as having different, 'primitive' cultures that had little to do with the English language above levels of functional literacy and less to do with change in the scientific and technological world. (1996: 215)

Bantu Education changed the vernacular publishing industry from a fairly liberal institution to one that met the Nationalist agenda: Afrikaans publishing houses wrested the monopoly on the vernacular education market from Lovedale Press, which had for so long encouraged Xhosa writers (Chapman 1996: 215). In Chapman's assessment, there is "[l]ittle African-language writing produced for schools under the strictures of Bantu Education" that has "re-evaluative potential". Generally, he argues, "the large themes of acculturation and transition" that were explored in earlier Xhosa literature "have been trivialised [in the later literature] into trite endorsements of the exotic tribal land" (1996: 216).

Those like Manisi, who began writing as apartheid issued its founding legislation, faced a frustrating new publishing world that was both discouraging and scarcely believable. Chapman reminds us of the promise the decade preceding

apartheid's implementation had held for African-language writers: in 1936 and 1937, African authors' conferences were held; a Literature Committee had been established and was led by prominent black intellectuals; and Lovedale Press was an active publisher. The suddenness with which this publishing scene collapsed under apartheid must have been very difficult for aspirant writers like Manisi to accept. In addition, vernacular writers faced the terrible irony that, although Bantu Education increased the need for vernacular texts (of a narrow kind), African language writing was co-opted wholesale, by virtue of its language of expression rather than its subject matter, into the Nationalist government's strategy of ethnic division.

Opland summarises the fate of book publication in Xhosa in this way: "If in the first half of the [twentieth] century ... only Xhosa works in harmony with Lovedale's mission philosophy were likely to appear, in the second half of the century only Xhosa works suitable for prescription in school are likely to appear" (1984: 185). The result of this shift in publishing focus, in Opland's view, is that "an adult literature has not yet evolved in Xhosa" (1984: 185). Constraining writers still further, school inspectors like H. W. Pahl, who recommended suitable material for school prescription, determined the range of themes and messages writers could express, and sometimes what form they should employ if they hoped their books might circulate. Pahl, for instance, preferred to prescribe narrative poetry rather than lyrical poems or, even less palatable to him, traditional Xhosa izibongo.

In an interview conducted by two Vassar College students in the United States in 1988, Manisi was asked to describe his publishing environment. His response suggests his frustration as an imbongi who felt called to write about urgent and contentious political matters:

... with our people it's very difficult to publish what we write because it has to be approved by the government. ... And what we write is almost only used in schools ... So for one to be a writer he must try that the books he writes would fit the schools. You must write rubbish, let me say so. You must write rubbish, not tell the truth about the situation. If you want to write a book about poetry, so you just have to talk about trees, rivers and all my nothings. (In Opland 2005: 325)

Manisi's poetry depends on the convention that the imbongi is a political figure tasked with the role of delivering honest verdicts on his community's behaviour. His

publishing context, Manisi felt, demanded that writers exchange their freedom to write honest, adult and politically astute material for publication opportunity.

Such was the publishing environment weathered by all black writers in South Africa who sought to reach vernacular audiences in print. Chapman catalogues the obstacles facing black poets: their hoped-for reading publics were only narrowly literate and had little disposable cash to spend on book-buying; publishing imperatives stipulated school-going readerships, and as apartheid strengthened so too did the liberation struggle's cultural aversion to tribal heritage and to vernacular publications (1996: 334). Helping to forge the last of these constraints, struggle poets appropriated oral praises and the techniques of oral performance into their hybrid written poetry<sup>9</sup>, but emptied their work of ethnic significance and wrote in English, which seemed to them to be "non-ethnic and unifying in the urban situation" (Chapman 1996: 334). The shift in publishing geography evidenced in Chapman's trajectory from rural to urban poetry and from rural vernaculars to urban englishes, reflects the rise of struggle culture whose producers came from, and were concerned in their work to address audiences in, townships and urban hostels.<sup>10</sup>

I have argued that Manisi was schooled in the missionary tradition of liberalism and moderation, but that he was nevertheless powerfully attached to traditional structures of authority and was critical of colonial and missionary motives. At the start of his public career in 1946, there seemed to Manisi to be no contradiction in his simultaneous dedication to chieftaincy and his membership of the ANC – both attachments seemed to the poet to promote black solidarity and dignity. Traditional leaders, many of them mission educated, had in fact helped to create and, initially, to lead the SANNC. Yet, as part of the polarisation of politics during apartheid, liberation organisations like the ANC increasingly distanced themselves from traditional politics, which they felt had become irrevocably tainted by apartheid, as well as irrelevant to urban township life. In an interview with Opland in November

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<sup>9</sup> Tony Emmett outlines the oral aspects of township poetry in the 1970s, and argues that it is impossible to assess this literature adequately without attending to its performative qualities and to the contexts and communities in which it was read (1979). Mbulelo V. Mzamane discusses black urban protest poetry in relation to the impact of Black Consciousness on black culture generally. Like Emmett, Mzamane acknowledges the role of oral forms like praise poetry in the urban context, but refers to rural praise poetry as primarily a pre-colonial art (1991: 183-184, 188-191).

<sup>10</sup> See also Cronin 1988, which discusses insurgent township poetry against the backdrop of uprisings, boycotts, strikes, rallies and physical confrontations between protesters and police.

1985, Manisi explains his early nationalism as well as his response to Mathanzima's support of the homeland programme:

As a youth I had the feeling that we as a people had lost all of our rights ... [At Lovedale] I learnt from historical books, and I got the knowledge that all we had was grabbed by the white man. So that remained in my mind till I grew up to be a young man who could make his own decisions. So there was an ANC organisation fighting for the rights of our people. In 1952 I joined the ANC to take part in the struggle for our freedom. In 1953 I was at the great place Qamata as a praise singer. It so happened that one day my paramount chief, K. D. Mathanzima, brought the *Daily Dispatch* and he read to us a portion saying that the Nationalist government was going to give power to the chiefs, and he was pleased with that and he wanted to know our opinion. Well, I questioned him: if at all we are freed by the Nationalist government, why do they choose to give freedom to the chiefs instead of to the people who are fighting for their freedom – the ANC and other organisations? Even in the past, it was the people who were the warriors. So I was out with him, telling him that I don't take it as freedom that is given to the chiefs because there were organisations fighting for the freedom of the people and the leaders of those organisations were the very people who should be consulted by the government. (2005: 20)

For Manisi, the institution of chieftaincy existed to serve the unity and prosperity of the people, and did not preclude the necessity and agency of other political institutions at the multi-racial national level. In the poet's definition, tradition was that which fostered bonds of obligation, trust and common humanity among people. This sense of rural politics and custom was not inherently conservative, yet it was rendered conservative and dismissed by the binaried politics of apartheid. That many chiefs were in fact complicit with apartheid, and that the imbongi's conventional freedoms were undermined in publishing and performance contexts by apartheid institutions and legislation, meant that appeals to chiefs like those made by Manisi were easily criticised for their apparent subscription to the political status quo. Whereas Manisi's guiding principles made use of history in ways that owed a debt to his rural-based intellectual predecessors, urban resistance writers used history in new ways to reflect militant ideals. For example, like Mqhayi, Wauchope, Gqoba and many others, Manisi revered the prophet-convert Ntsikana, whose politics of black unity was moderate. In one of his historical poems for Opland, performed in 1970, Manisi excuses Ntsikana and blames Makana (otherwise known as Nxele), Ntsikana's contemporary and opponent, for ills that befell the Rharhabe. Resistance and protest

writers preferred to enlist the example of Makana, however, because of his later rejection of Christianity and his abortive but brave attacks against colonial forces.<sup>11</sup> Chapman argues that, “in the Black Consciousness poetry of the 1970s, Makana was given iconic significance as a figure of resistance while the political prison, Robben Island, was renamed the Isle of Makana” (1996: 105).<sup>12</sup>

The rise of black city voices of resistance whose oppositional tactics were unlike Manisi’s in important respects, the appearance of a few brave publishers who would disseminate black writing in English, and a growing urban repudiation of rural-based tradition, seen as nothing more than backward, divisive practice, left Manisi intellectually and ideologically stranded, his terms of reference suddenly overburdened, his desired publics divided, and his personal loyalties out of synch with one another. Indeed, in making a special case for the Zulu poets who had adapted *izibongo* to trade union contexts and to print form, Ari Sitas implies the binary potentials of praise poetry during apartheid: these trade union poets “and their vernacular noises, their pushing outwards of the expressive resources of poetry in Zulu, are no apartheid adjustments, nor are they tribal embarrassments” (1994: 152). In the eyes of such poets, Manisi, rural *imbongi*, was just such a “tribal embarrassment”. Constrained by narrow publishing imperatives, estranged from the primary subject of his early poetry, and increasingly isolated, intellectually and geographically, from the broad appeal and legitimacy of urban protest, Manisi nevertheless tenaciously pursued publication throughout his career. In the next chapter, I suggest how he reconceived of the mechanics of print publication as a way of writing for future audiences, which he tried to address in terms of their Xhosa and larger black identities. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall explore Manisi’s conflicting attitudes to what I have argued are mutually implicating subjects – education, writing, black liberation, and racial oppression – in order to suggest his reasons for valuing the written word despite his sense of its violent colonial origins.

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<sup>11</sup> Janet Hodgson discusses Makana’s life and beliefs as well as his appropriation by militant black writers as a symbol of resistance (1985, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Eventually, Makana was captured by colonial forces and sent to Robben Island where it is thought that he drowned in an abortive attempt to escape his imprisonment.

## Dignity, history, education and the record

In his performance poetry, Manisi frequently criticises missionaries and colonials for their promotion of Christianity, literacy and print among African populations. There is nothing new in his scepticism. Shepherd recalls, in his history of Lovedale, one of the earliest occasions on which the Xhosa suspicion of print and Christianity manifested: the missionary van der Kemp was in Ngqika's territory at the turn of the eighteenth century. When the chief "contracted a disease of the eyes, his people persuaded him that it was due to his attempt to read the word of God" (1971: 1). Opland charts a long tradition in Xhosa *izibongo* of mission educators as untrustworthy and of the negatively constructed image of the book (1998: 301-323). He provides evidence that for early Xhosa poets "[m]ission education and European writing were linked to territorial dispossession" (1998: 308), and that "[t]he gun and the book are associated at the very dawn of literacy among the Xhosa ..." (1998: 310). Although she was a devout Christian, Nontsizi Mqgwetho, for example, repeatedly wrote about her sense of the Bible's association with treachery and deceit (Opland 1998: 314).

This idea of the 'first' book as a symbol of missionary betrayal and colonial violence is central to Manisi's oral poetry.<sup>13</sup> At the 1820 Settlers' Monument in Grahamstown in July 1977, Manisi faced a predominantly white, English-speaking audience and declaimed:

for you entered bearing the Bible  
and you said, 'Receive the tome  
and cast off lore and custom.'  
We took up the Bible and followed you,  
minister turned into soldier,  
he raised his musket and blasted his cannon. (159)<sup>14</sup>

At Vassar College in 1988, Manisi brandished a piece of paper angrily as he performed a poem in which he spoke of the colonial invasion that, he argued above, missionary activity supported:

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<sup>13</sup> Several South African scholars have discussed the problem of what the Bible represents to many black South African Christians. See, for example, Mosala (1986), Mofokeng (1988) and West (1995). Mofokeng cites the popular anecdote that "[w]hen the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said "let us pray". After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible" (1988: 34).

<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for poems and quotations from poems refer to their location in Opland 2005.

They mastered and made us their servants.  
 Then we were grabbed and chased to the forests.  
 In the forests we broke our spears,  
 we fought with axes hacking trees.  
 Suddenly up popped the paper  
 of the cunning treatysmiths  
 who snatched for themselves the lion's share of land. (280)

In the Vassar poem, defeated people are forced into labour in the service of paper production – paper that is used to document colonials' appropriation of their labourers' land. In both extracts, indigenes admit book and paper, and all they represent, to the detriment of their traditional occupations and beliefs.

Indeed, as early as 1817, Ngqika had rejected the colonial word and world in favour of his customary Xhosa lifestyle. He was living at a mission station when he heard that Lord Charles Somerset was preparing to attack him. In his farewell statement to the missionaries, he declared that, "if I adopt your law I must entirely overturn my own. And that I shall not do. I shall begin now to dance and praise my beasts as much as I please, and shall let all see who is the head of this land" (Mostert 1992: 458). Discussing the incident, Opland notes that "Ngqika perceived the two cultural modes as antithetical: acceptance of the white man's word necessarily entailed overturning the Xhosa customary life" (2003: 9). There are many instances in which Manisi expresses such a view. In a poem he wrote about Sabatha for *Umtshunywa* in 1952, Manisi associates arbitrary, unjust white laws with written documents: "a letter was filed in Pretoria/ with the great judge of Joubert's tribe./ A letter came back from the whites at twilight/ denying the prince his rights ..." (66). In contrast, in the same poem, Sabatha's rule is characterised by traditional Xhosa symbols and modes of communication: "we have a great day before us/ the day you're handed Ngangelizwe's stick/ empowering you to try cases: you point with it to make law" (68).

Ngangelizwe's stick refers to the precious custom of inherited right that preserves Xhosa community and that is exercised by rightful Xhosa leaders in contexts of discussion. Although Sabatha points to make law, that law must be congenial to his advisors and people, who attend his court to debate matters of principle. Indeed, one of the grounds on which Manisi criticises the learned Mathanzima in a poem published in *Umteteli* in 1955, is that: "Discussion is foreign

to Mhlobo's son,/ presuming to judge nobles he subverts justice" (75). Xhosa laws, Manisi suggests, function justly in oral contexts of debate and should not be decreed in the unilateral way in which white people issue their laws in documents. For Manisi, whose poetry and sense of the world turned on the work of preserving and valuing tradition, the links he perceived between paper, print and education, and the destruction of people's attachment to their traditional ways of life must have exacerbated his sense of isolation in writing a traditional form of poetry.

But Manisi did not live in the same world as that inhabited by Ngqika. A mission-educated writer and poet, he could not, and did not wish to, merely reject the word and customs brought by missionaries. His attitudes to education, writing and books were consequently never clear-cut. As I have suggested, Manisi was often critical of colonial imports. In the poem about Sabatha from which I quoted above, the poet implies his approval of Sabatha's refusal to seek Western education: Mathanzima "wanted him sent to Stewart's Scots in Skirts<sup>15</sup>/ to sharpen his horns to also judge the whites," but Sabatha refused and "pulped the plan" (66-67). At times, Manisi criticises Mathanzima on the grounds that his Western education has distanced him from Xhosa traditions. In a poem recorded by Opland in the course of his fieldwork in 1972, Manisi asserts: "this Hala chief's a problem:/ we gave him a throwing spear but he smashed it,/ we gave him a stabbing spear and he smashed it,/ then we gave him learning and he worked on it" (111). Yet, although in the same poem Mathanzima is named "a great tome of the whites" and is criticised for finding "friends in strange nations" (110; 111), he is also implicitly congratulated for having "confronted sages and scholars" (110) and for having sought out "the wisdom of whites" which was kept "hoarded for safekeeping,/ for rednecks' sons to use/ in keeping control of the country" (112). In his third poem at Transkei's 'independence' celebration in Umtata in 1976, Manisi urges Mathanzima and Sigcawu, respectively Transkei's first prime minister and president, to rule under God's direction and with the wisdom of learning (141-142). Before all of his academic audiences in South Africa and abroad, Manisi campaigned for better education for all black people. Despite his concern that Xhosa people were turning away from their traditions and customs, he never envisioned an ideal Xhosa future in which only traditional forms of education would be available -- indeed, as I shall suggest, he saw print and education as potential storehouses for the

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<sup>15</sup> By "Stewart's Scots in Skirts", Manisi refers to Lovedale, which had been established by Scottish missionaries.



preservation of Xhosa tradition. As I shall argue in Chapter Six, perhaps the main problem in Manisi's sense of education, given the totalising nature of his apartheid context, was his overestimation of what the campaign for good education might accomplish.

Manisi's understanding of education as the root of dignity and political freedom stems from his inheritance of a fading world in which educated black intellectuals had enjoyed considerably greater freedom (as people, thinkers and writers) than he would. However well he understood the role of the black education debate and of Bantu Education in segregationist politics, his idea that resistance could begin with better education was flawed because education does not exist outside of the political dispensation by which it is governed. Whereas Manisi's predecessors were actively engaged in the education debate and had some chance of bringing their arguments to political contexts of discussion by virtue of the limited Cape franchise, the liberal system in the Cape had collapsed in 1936 when the vote was removed from all blacks except for those classified as Coloureds. Manisi was born into a world in which, with education, age and adequate returns on employment won by education, he could have accessed the Cape Colony's politics. But, when he was 9 years old, that potential future was closed to him and all of his contemporaries. Apartheid's Homeland scheme decisively removed blacks from South African citizenship, with the result that there was no way that a black person could campaign effectively for changes to education policy in South Africa.

Yet, in 1988, Manisi told his student-interviewers at Vassar College that he blamed Americans for failing to avail black South Africans of better education "because we would have our own publishers, and our own presses for that matter, were we educated" (326). The foreign education of black exiles certainly contributed to the liberation struggle and, even more significantly perhaps, to the post-apartheid leadership, but Manisi's liberal impulse championed a liberation programme based entirely on dignified and learned negotiation. His sense that the system could be challenged from within if only black people were able to speak and write as equals of educated whites, grew out of his heritage of a faded intellectual scene that had been dominated by the rural-based moderates of a political era in which white authorities had at least pretended to hear the political voice of the educated black minority.

Thus, despite his severe criticism of Mathanzima's complicity with apartheid, Manisi, in a highly contradictory move, also champions his chief for using Western

education against white people. In his earliest newspaper publication in *Umtshunywa*, Manisi writes of Mathanzima:

He's a traveller disliked by whites,  
a well trained scholar with sprawling learning,  
with knowledge as vast as that of a white chief,  
he speeds to enlighten his benighted people  
while others live in clarity. (54)

In his characterisation of Mathanzima, in which he only hints at criticism by comparing his chief to a white chief, Manisi uncritically uses the missionary discourse of light and darkness: those who lack Western education live in darkness, and the spread of education brings light in its wake.

In another of his newspaper poems about Mathanzima, Manisi claims:

He's an accomplished scholar, an expert,  
whose advanced learning's like stars,  
the chief's son's an intellectual.

He leads the nation with learning,  
protects himself with the Word of God,  
... (57)

Whereas much of his poetry criticises missionaries for imposing education and the Word of God on Africans, Manisi, a devout Christian, also believes in learning and the Bible as dignifying and empowering agents of civilisation and humanity. Jonathan Draper argues that Manisi's "diatribe against colonialism" does not reject the Word of God itself, but rather indicates resistance to "the ideological control of the Bible" by missionaries and colonials (2003: 57-58). I shall argue that Manisi does not always escape the ideological control of missionary beliefs and discourses, but that he tries to tie his Christianity to his Africanism. Manisi's beliefs inspired him to write a poem for *Inguqu* about one of his Lovedale teachers, the Xhosa mission-teacher Arosi. The izibongo reveals Manisi's sense, just prior to the implementation of Bantu Education when missionary schools were still operative, of the potentially complementary relationship between traditional leadership and community, Christianity and education:

...  
 To you today we entrust our sticks,  
 we give you this village.  
 Bring forth the sage and the wise,  
 create the learned and the expert  
 to lead Ngubengcuka's<sup>16</sup> village  
 with broad knowledge and understanding  
 so our nation ranks with the famous.  
 Place God before you  
 to guard and protect this village,  
 to lend your deeds success and strength,  
 to give you strength by great power  
 to defeat and expel great foes  
 with the strength that comes from on high,  
 from that Home of homes,  
 from the Lord of lords,  
 the Prince of princes.  
 Truly your wisdom must be superior  
 if you're trusted by Ndaba's<sup>17</sup> village ...  
 (Opland Collection: 540421.18)

As Manisi's writing testifies, there existed alongside the idea that education, Christianity and the Word are agents of deception, another tradition among Xhosa writers, concerned with the value of print as a civilised weapon against injustice. Undoubtedly, this sense of print issues from the influence of the liberal tradition, and certainly informed the politics of figures like J. T. Jabavu and his son, D. D. T. Jabavu, as well as many nineteenth and early twentieth century black intellectuals. Opland cites a poem written by Wauchope for a June 1882 edition of the newspaper *Isigidimi samaXosa* that, he claims, "might well stand as the anthem of his generation of writers" (1998: 226). Two stanzas from the poem read:

Your cattle are plundered, compatriot!  
 After them! After them!  
 Lay down the muskets,  
 Take up the pen.  
 Seize paper and ink:  
 That's your shield.  
 ...  
 Your rights are plundered!  
 Grab a pen,  
 Load, load it with ink;

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<sup>16</sup> See Note on Genealogy.

<sup>17</sup> See Note on Genealogy.

Sit in your chair,  
 Don't head for Hoho:  
 Fire with your pen. (Opland 1998: 227)

Manisi's attitudes to print and education are often paradoxical. I have given evidence of his indictments of the violence done to indigenous populations by colonial documents and by the imposition of Western education and 'civilisation', symbolised best by the Bible and the gun. And yet Manisi read voraciously, wrote whenever paper presented itself for inscription, and, throughout his career, demanded of all his white audiences that equal education should be provided for all South African people. Although, as we have seen, Manisi often invoked his chief's education as evidence of Mathanzima's willingness to discard custom for Western bribes to the detriment of his own people, calling him a "book of the whites", at other times the poet speaks proudly of Mathanzima's academic distinction. His shift back and forth on the matter epitomises the dilemma of the black intellectual in postcolonial Africa, and even more so the rural poet writing into the void of apartheid's vernacular reading community.

Manisi was always concerned to demonstrate to a broad community of educated people that the Xhosa have a proud literature. This motivation for writing is of course compromised, confirming as it does a set of goals – to do with publication and Western intellectual prowess – nurtured and institutionalised by colonial education. It is perhaps one of the greatest traps of the moderate, liberal position for those oppressed by the system at work that efforts to compete equally in terms of that system rarely either win equality or register adequate protest. Nevertheless, for Manisi, the notion of print as proud showcase held considerable appeal. In his moving poem addressed to Mqhayi, published in *Inguqu* in 1954, Manisi praises his literary hero for writing "books of experience/ speaking to us about jokes and traditions", and for having "created legacies for us" as a "well-experienced one in writing" (Opland Collection: 540421.15)

In 1982, Manisi published a poem in *Imvo* to commemorate the death of Professor Z. S. Qangule, a Xhosa academic who had been a lecturer at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Manisi expounds in the poem the multiple values of publication, writing of Qangule:

For to us you are all things.  
 Your sound is still heard,  
 Fighting, raging, howling,  
 Carrying a pen, stabbing with it,  
 You wrote books and we nibbled closely  
 Like an octopus holding fast to a stone  
 ...  
 You praised for us and the enlightened were surprised  
 You educated us about things obscure and difficult.  
 Through you we gained respect and worth  
 Acclaim and deference  
 And you were our boast to decorate ourselves with  
 You were our stick that made us proud  
 You bring our honour among the nations.  
 (Opland Collection: 820623)

For Manisi print has the virtue of publishing greatness to the world, of advancing Xhosa dignity among nations by demonstrating Xhosa capacity to compete in world terms and media. In addition to its demonstrative capacity, print is important to Manisi for its potential to endure as a tangible legacy and monument to the beauty of the Xhosa language and to national histories that warrant preservation, particularly given the erasures effected by official apartheid history. Jordan argues that “[t]o the Bantu-speaking Southern Africans, the praise poem is their proudest possession. It is in this genre that the greatest possibilities of a Bantu language are to be found” (1973: 21). He writes here of oral performance but it is clear in the writing of many Xhosa poets that Jordan’s sense of izibongo as treasured possession and showcase is given added dimension by the object-like and enduring qualities of the print medium.

Manisi’s commitment to the Xhosa language is expressed in the vocabulary and imagery he used to craft both his oral and his written izibongo. For Manisi, some of the value in publishing praise poetry lies in celebrating and preserving his mother tongue, and in the potential of print to transmit to future generations of readers an appreciation of Xhosa. I have argued that Manisi faced considerable social change in his lifetime, most of it destructive of what he valued in African communities. His strong urge to record and preserve is understandable given his concern that young Xhosa people, subject to apartheid systems of education and receding domestic normalcy, would have no way of knowing their language and history intimately unless those who nurtured such knowledge wrote it down for them. But Manisi was also a political poet, concerned with the present, who wished to be engaged in the national struggle for black liberation as one of its publishing intellectuals. The

difficulty for Manisi at the time he wrote was that one of his potential contemporary audiences – an urban, educated Xhosa elite – increasingly associated his literary efforts with Bantu education and the disruption of African unity. Chapman sees the eastern Cape literary tradition as extending from figures like Ntsikana and Makana to Mqhayi and Rubusana to figures like “the educationist, Z. K. Matthews, the Black Consciousness activist Steve Biko, and the politician Nelson Mandela” (1996: 110). Manisi is not mentioned as an influential figure in Chapman’s outline of the eastern Cape tradition. That is because, as we have seen, despite his enormous early promise, Manisi never became an influence on Xhosa or other black writers. His books were silent in their day. Although Yako berated A. C. Jordan for having failed to hear Manisi perform at the 1951 ceremony in honour of Mqhayi, Jordan never sought Manisi’s voice in the poet’s 1952 or 1954 books. In his celebrated articles on Xhosa literature published in 1957<sup>18</sup>, Jordan makes no mention of Manisi in his discussion of contemporary publishing poets.

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<sup>18</sup> The articles were collected and republished in Jordan 1973.

## Chapter Two

### The Uses of Print in Contexts of Constraint

Manisi's written izibongo invite discussion of what Kaschula calls the "oral-literate interface" (2002: 65-100). Accounts of oral literature often argue that literacy threatens the practice and value of oral traditions (Lord 1960, Ong 1982, Goody 1986). In the fields of Zulu and Xhosa oral literature, scholars have expressed anxiety about the impact that writing might have on the practice of oral izibongo. In 1986, Liz Gunner asked whether Zulu izibongo as practiced among rural communities would continue to be viable given the rise during that decade of a generation of literate urban praise poets, many of whom wrote their poetry before performing it. In 2002, Russell Kaschula suggested both that oral and written Xhosa praise poetry exist simultaneously on a continuum (65), and that "[t]his duality between orality and literacy implies ... a cross over period where the iimbongi are not only producing oral poetry, but also writing down their poetry, either in the form of original written poetry or transcribed versions of previously performed oral poetry" (2002: 66). Kaschula's helpful image of the continuum, according to which various practices of oral genres coexist, is contradicted by the implicit meaning of a "crossover period": that the technology of writing will inevitably come to dominate oral practice.

Nineteenth century African history provides us with considerable evidence of the violence of print as a colonial weapon of land appropriation, and of the book as a symbol of the colonial assertion of power over indigenous peoples. However, it is anachronistic to investigate the oral-print confluence in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century texts from the historical perspective of first contact, even if several of these texts refer to the violent arrival of print among historical oral communities. Terence Ranger reminds us that there is no credibility in "the idea of still-existing but separate oral and literate worldviews" (2003: 238). Even in societies like South Africa where many people are functionally illiterate, the oral and the literate have long since coexisted and interpenetrated. Examinations of the effect of print on oral psychologies and practices, like that by Walter Ong (1982) and Jack Goody (1986), focus on the new world that print represents to those for whom writing is a novel concept.<sup>1</sup> But such conditions of novelty no longer obtain, and Ong's thesis has been used to

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Furniss argues against the dichotomies between print and orality established by Ong and other critics in the Ongian tradition in his chapter on "Academic Approaches to Orality" (2004: 131-163).

support an overly generalised and absolute distinction between the community identity fostered by orality and the individualism enabled by print media (Gusdorf 1980, Ong 1982). Publishing iimbongi like Mqhayi and Manisi also disprove the linked assertions made by Lord, that only “unlettered bards” can engage in spontaneous oral composition (1962: 184-185), and by Ong, that “the powerful and beautiful verbal performances” produced by once oral cultures become impossible after the arrival of literacy (1982: 14).

Contrary to accounts like Ong and Lord’s, Hofmeyr has argued that the trajectory in histories of orality and literacy is not from orality to literacy, but rather from orality to various combinations of orality and literacy (1993: 13). Writing about the period of first contact between oral and literate cultures in Southern Africa, Hofmeyr shows that official documents and written communications between colonial administrators and indigenes were often ‘oralised’ to cope with the conventions of trust as well as of textual interpretation long practised in oral communities (1993: 14). Although they are not figures of first contact, poets like Mqhayi and Manisi demonstrate that while print defines their art and creative identity in several ways, so too does the oral genre of izibongo. Both poets wrote prolifically but were known among their local communities primarily as traditional performers. In light of such examples, it is difficult to credit Kaschula’s recent engagement with the psychological effects of print on contemporary South African performance poets. Without exception, each of the performers he discusses is educated and literate and yet performs oral izibongo in the traditional, spontaneous way. His suggestion that “the changing tradition of the iimbongi is today open to a study where the impact of writing on the ‘oral’ mind can be addressed” (2002: 72) is not only impracticable insofar as there is no ‘oral’ mind to study; it also loses sight of the more useful investigation of how oral and print media shape the texts they translate in terms of their conventions of address and their economies of circulation.

Far from its being eclipsed by print media, Manisi’s reputation as an oral poet travelled on the back of print report and by way of Yako’s published izibongo, itself a hybrid poem in which an oral genre speaks from the page. For Xhosa poets like Yako, Mqhayi and Mgqwetho, there is no contradiction in using print to harness the rhythms, authorities and ways of speaking offered by oral genres. Long after the irrevocable establishment of literacy and literate form in southern Africa, we can recognise in the work of publishing iimbongi the oralising effect of oral genres



deployed in print. It is not the case, I shall argue, that print inevitably and finally settles and solidifies the genres it mediates – in Manisi's published izibongo, the combination of print and oral genre produces poems that harness some of the capacities of each medium. The resultant texts recall the authorities and powers of the oral genre, but are invested with latent potential and travel differently, among anonymous but specifically addressed publics rather than the enumerable audience members of performance contexts.

Marshall McLuhan has observed that "[a]rtists in various fields are always the first to discover how to enable one medium to use or to release the power of another" (in Jahandarie 1999: 54). In this chapter, I discuss the relationship reflected in Manisi's written praise poems between print media and the oral genre of izibongo. I argue that his newspaper poems harness the urgency of the izibongo form to the immediacy of the newspaper medium to create texts that circulate among contemporary reading publics, the members of which are invited, according to terms of address used by oral izibongo, to read themselves as belonging to highly specific political communities. As I discussed in the previous chapter, however, Manisi's newspaper poetry accounts for a small portion of his writing career, which was frustrated by dwindling adult readerships for Xhosa literature. I shall argue that his book-published poetry is given stability and solidity by the quality of endurance attached to the book medium, but that it also transports oral energies into print so that future Xhosa audiences, if Manisi's books survive their diminished stocks, can be engaged and exhorted by the latent voice of the praise poet.

Having established the different ways in which Manisi's written poetry speaks in print, I shall turn in the second half of the chapter to a more detailed discussion of the political communities Manisi tries to address in some of his newspaper and book poems. I shall begin by comparing three poems about prominent Thembu chiefs. The first two appeared in newspapers in the 1950s while the third was published in Manisi's 1980 collection, *Yaphum' ingqina*. Read together, the poems reveal something of the growing complexity in Manisi's position as a poet of the chieftdom, and as a political subject. In analysing the kinds of address made by each of the poems in relation to my discussion of print media, I shall consider the poet's shifting relationship to the subjects of his izibongo, his readers and to the act of writing itself. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Manisi's unsuccessful print address of his Rhodes University colleagues to suggest the poet's difficulty in reaching not only the

Xhosa audiences of his primary concern, but also the English-speaking audiences of his compromised academic opportunities.

### **Evanesence and permanence: an oral genre in print**

There are several long established and widely accepted differences between print and spoken texts. Finnegan encapsulates one of the most familiar of these in her comparison between the fleeting quality of verbal expression and the permanence suggested by writing, a medium that “allows for an independent and withdrawn author” (1988: 17-18). According to Halliday:

To the reader, the text is presented synoptically: it exists, spread out on the page. So the reader is predisposed to take a synoptic view of what it means; behind it is a tableau – like the pictures from which writing originally evolved, but when one is listening, the text reaches one dynamically: it happens, by travelling through the air. So the listener is predisposed to take a dynamic view of what it means; behind it is a film, not a picture. (1987: 74)

The object-quality of the printed word is well established, although it is untrue, as Halliday’s assertion perhaps implies, that reception of a verbal text cannot take account of the delivery as a whole, or that a written text is not digested in parts before the whole can be apprehended.

Barber’s discussion of the way in which Yoruba audiences interpret oriki provides evidence that once an oral text has been delivered, its receivers can make sense of it in parts and as a unit, not quite as a reader rereads a paragraph but nevertheless in ways that reveal retention and possession of what has been said (1999a). In the case of written izibongo, the insistence of the form’s disjunctive mode and its construction as concatenation mitigate against a unity of textuality like that which Halliday posits for print texts. Barber has written about the disruptive, disconnected mode of African praise poetry as apparently inviting comparison with postmodern writing styles (1984), an invitation that reminds us of the ways in which highly literate modes can also deconstruct textual integrity. But whereas postmodern styles of writing seek to disrupt readers’ preconceptions about stories and the worlds they represent, izibongo come to the page not to challenge the conventions of print,

but rather to transport into print the authorities, communities and modes of appeal enacted by the oral form.

In *Umthunywa* on 27 September 1947, in the first part of a poem published in three instalments, Manisi's debut print contribution begins:

Aa! Daliwonga

Lend me a stick to lean on, my chief,  
lend me a stick to lean on, my nation,  
this stick I lean on's crooked,  
this stick I lean on's knotted.  
Lend me an ebony stick to drive cows,  
to drive the suckling cows out to graze.  
The path I tread is full of thorns:  
I'm not a poet, I'm a child,  
those who know me say I'm a baby,  
but just you listen to what I say.  
To you, then, son of Mathanzima:

Hail, Fix it Quick!

He's Fix it Quick, the son of Mathanzima,  
tall corn waving in wind, dark man with honour,  
gangly tower, giant trailing fronds;  
he's the heaven that strikes without thundering,  
he's Weedcutter, an axe honed by use,  
fort-dweller like a white chief;  
an elegant figure, the son of Mathanzima,  
an elegant figure, the son of a chief. (52)<sup>2</sup>

In the first stanza, the poet appeals to his chief and nation for authority to speak and for an attentive audience. Manisi's personal stature as an imbongi, signalled here by a reverse insistence on his obscurity and youth, is introduced as central to the poem's operation so that the traditional call to attention is lengthened in print but clearly imagines an oral context by emphasising personal contact and summoning. The second stanza, which is more disjointed than the first, supplies Mathanzima with praise names and concludes with a couplet that acts as a refrain in the poem. "An elegant figure, the son of Mathanzima,/ an elegant figure, the son of a chief" alternates with its variant, "an elegant figure, the son of Mhlobo,/ an elegant figure, the son of a chief" to complete each stanza, except for the first stanza of the first instalment and

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for poems and extracts from poems refer to their location in Opland 2005.

the final stanzas of each of the three instalments. The contrast between disjunctive epithets – like ‘He’s Fix it Quick’ and ‘tall corn waving in wind’ – and the refrain, marks the text as a meeting place for different textualities that in combination have unexpected effects on each other.

Whereas in performance poets do not declaim their izibongo in stanzas and transcription of oral texts tends to register line breaks where the imbongi pauses for breath, the presence of a refrain and stanzas in Manisi’s print poems suggests the transformation of oral form by dominant print media. The editorial decision to publish Manisi’s first newspaper poem in parts, in three non-consecutive issues of the paper, characterises the izibongo as episodic and divisible, which is unlike the oral practice of the form. Yet the refrain, the stanzas and the tripartite division of the poem read strangely. Their effect, paradoxically, is to disrupt categories often attributed to the written: the refrain and the stanza are obvious insertions into a non-Western oral poetics and reveal the constructedness of print textuality, while the episodic division, rather than merely exploiting the non-linearity of the oral form, interrupts the notion of print unity, especially given its context in the serial, ephemeral medium of the newspaper.

To support his argument that verbal texts are evanescent, while print is characterised by the quality of permanence, Halliday cites the greater incidence of verbs in speech compared to the preponderance in writing of nouns (in Jahandarie 1999: 135). Speech tends to use the present tense – it is, as many critics suggest, incantatory and active in nature – whereas writing, by its very nature as record, deals in what has happened. Opland discusses izibongo as invocation, focusing on the form’s use in ancestor veneration. He argues that “Western taxonomies do not always sit easily with African forms, and this is especially so for literary genres. Izibongo shares with the western conception of poetry the artful use of words in elevated style”. Nevertheless, he concludes, “[i]zibongo has closer affinities to incantation, and I suspect it retains its sacral function by naming the ancestors and entering into ritual communication with them” (2002: 11). The focus of Opland’s comments is on the very ontology of the praise poem – how it exists and in what kind of world. One of the several ideas attached to the idea of izibongo as incantation is the assumption of an audience that is bound together by common ancestors and by mutual cultural understanding. Such an audience can be addressed in print but cannot be relied upon as a readership, nor can the economies of print circulation be limited to that select

group. Opland's focus on the incantatory implies that something is performed and altered in the poet's act of speech. Unlike the voluble presence of the poet during performance, print neither contains the speaker's physical voice nor dissolves into air and reaches completion. Written izibongo must, in Opland's sense, fail as sacred invocation because it solidifies its expression and publishes community in profane contexts of print circulation.

Like Opland in his explanation of Xhosa izibongo, Barber describes oriki as activity, as that which effects change (1991: 81), but she also helps us to understand the ontological complexity of praise poetry by highlighting the object-quality of praises: oriki, she contends, "are paths that are kept open to allow the flow of power and beneficence between beings" (1991: 290). Elsewhere, she argues that "it is not exclusively, or even principally, the performance that is detached, 'objectified', and partially lifted from its interactive setting: it is the texts themselves, in the sense of configurations of words constituted *as* texts – and ... this in part accounts for the texts' power and effectivity" (1999b: 290). Barber's insights pertain to memorial traditions where praise names are recalled and redeployed, and it could be objected that in the case of extemporary Xhosa izibongo the concept of textual detachability is inimical to the form's inherent spontaneity of composition. Yet, as all commentators agree, Xhosa praise poems contain formulae, often unique to the career of a particular poet. Manisi's performances are connected by intertextual threads, which include repeated phrases, images and themes, and many of his poems bear trademark signatures outlining the poet's sense of his literary identity and function.

As well as the object-quality attached to praise poems by their detachable and transferable formulae, izibongo are built of the concrete of names. While praise poems act in performance, they are also, to return to the terms of Halliday's distinction, comprised substantially of nouns, and these nouns in turn contain verbs that characterise their agents' actions in the world. In Manisi's first *Umthunywa* poem for Mathanzima, two stanzas of which are cited above, the subject of the izibongo is invoked not simply in terms of what he has done, but by images that provide names for him and encapsulate his impact on his environment: "he's the heaven that strikes without thundering,/ he's Weedcutter, an axe honed by use". In the final stanza of the third instalment of the same *Umthunywa* poem, published on 31 July 1948, Manisi distils his chief's identity into three names:

Hail, Maker of Majesty!  
 the name he's called at home;  
 hail, Fix it Quick!  
 the name he's called by nations;  
 hail, Sunlike!  
 the name he's called in private; ... (56)

Print emphasises the object-quality of praise names. Some, like 'Creator of Splendour' and 'Active Arranger', resurface in Manisi's written and performed poems about Mathanzima, but even those epithets that slip away into disuse nevertheless have solidity when they are coined as tangible embodiments of the subject they invoke.

There are, of course, many aspects of izibongo that are ephemeral, including the immediate demands made of a poem's subject by the poet. In the third instalment of Manisi's *Umthunywa* poem, the poet directs Mathanzima: "stop our land's hesitation,/ our land is precipitous cliffs," and, "today we've made you our sacrifice,/ you'll be an offering for nation and country" (55). Exhortations of this kind operate in performance as poetic responses to the exigencies of particular moments and contexts; in the newspaper medium, which is especially amenable to the immediacy of oral izibongo, if poems are published soon after their submission, the poet's injunctions also relate to the political context of the moment and are perceived as such by readers. (In *The Dassie*, however, the poem above records the bitter poignancy of the poet's initial faith in his chief). In contrasting solid naming segments with more ephemeral exhortations, I mean to complicate the temporalities in which these primary units of izibongo work in performance and print. My purpose is to suggest the different layers of immediacy and sedimentation enacted by izibongo as a form, and to argue that the genre is not inimical to print, although print might draw out and emphasise certain aspects of it, and so shape the ways in which an izibongo works from the page.

The newspaper has several affiliations with verbal media. Editions are not, for instance, intended for retention (except perhaps as clippings that commemorate), and are inoperative as news or current opinion beyond the ephemeral moment of their production. The newspaper medium is, as I have suggested, especially accommodating of the evanescent qualities and political urgency of izibongo, which explains the rise of the printed praise poem in the late nineteenth century when newspapers were central to political debate among an active Xhosa intelligentsia. Hofmeyr outlines Soga's advice to the readers of an 1862 edition of *Isigidimi* on the

subject of how they should approach the new newspaper medium: the newspaper's arrival in their homes was to be treated as an event for which they should prepare by stoking up and gathering around a fire, and listening attentively as the father of the family reads out the day's news. Soga "likens the newspaper to a visitor and outstanding conversationalist" (Hofmeyr 2004: 114). Soga's advice specifically oralises the newspaper.<sup>3</sup> Brown suggests that in the 1920s, "Mgqwetho finds a powerful congruence between the oral and newsprint modes: ... like an oral poem, which generally exists only in its moment of performance, the newspaper poem will be read once and then discarded with the rest of the publication". As such, he continues, each poem "is crucially a specific address for that particular moment" (2004: 6).

Editorial intervention can disrupt the parallel between poetic address and its appropriate context of reception. As we have seen, Manisi's first newspaper poem was divided across three editions of *Umthunywa*, the last segment published a full 10 months after the first so that the integrity of the poem as a whole and its relation to its moment of composition were lost to its episodic audiences. Another of Manisi's newspaper poems, published in *Umteteli wa Bantu* on 20 November 1948, offers a different set of textual complexities. J. T. Arosi introduces the izibongo in these words:

At last the long-awaited day arrived. Chief Daliwonga Mathanzima arrived at noon on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1948. This chief arrived with a host of men riding horses from Qamata, and that great cavalcade stopped all the cars in the streets of Cala. Whites were not exactly thrilled with the poets capering, carrying assegais and strutting as if the town were theirs. Oh today the son of Manisi has come into his own: he is an imbongi. He spoke again and again, saying in a loud voice: ... (57)

The introduction stipulates a performance context, one that is already in the past, so that the poem is cast as record or report. Arosi implies that the poem the reader will read is a transcription of the performance given by Manisi at a particular event. In fact it is unlikely that the poem is a transcription, although we have no way of being

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<sup>3</sup> Soga also compares the newspaper "to a corn-pit that provides nourishment, or a container where treasures and valuable things are kept" (Hofmeyr 2004: 114). This alternative sense of the medium proposes a second reading strategy focused on learning, showcasing and preserving. Manisi would apply these characteristics to the book.

certain. It is likely that Manisi was asked to contribute a poem to Arosi's report that was worked around his memory of the izibongo he had declaimed at the event. It was not usual practice to tape record such visits, so that the possibility that the poem is a faithful transcription of the performance it references is very small. Nevertheless, if the written poem is the result of the poet's re-imagining of the event and his performance contribution on that day, we can begin to perceive the potential layers of contextuality and textuality invested in the print product. The newspaper poem invites its readers to read as a way of accessing a specific performance and its context, and in this way the transcription mode that the poem invokes is particularly well suited to the newspaper medium. The large potential reading public is attached by the poem to the local community of a recent performance, which is revived and re-imagined in print.

The book, like the newspaper, can be an event: it can unfold for the reader as a comment on the contemporary context; it can be shelved once read and never opened again. However, the book also commonly hosts many (re-)readings. In his advice on how to read his translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Soga characterises the book, like its protagonist, as the reader's co-traveller. Readers are advised: "take things slowly, do not rush, read carefully and thoughtfully. Stop and think about what you have read" (Hofmeyr 2004: 113). The book is a patient companion and has lessons to teach the reader. For Manisi the archetypal book was the Bible. Its arrival heralded violence and testified, as did Bunyan's text, to the book's capacity to travel, proliferate and circulate across the globe. But the Bible is also durable and is experienced by its readers as containing intimate, exhortatory address that stems from the timeless voice of God, a voice that can be activated whenever readers open their Books. It is this capacity for endurance and for latent exhortation and address that particularly attracted Manisi to the book form. Like the Bible, which teaches histories and lessons and engages the reader with its 'oral' voice, the books Manisi wrote were intended to preserve the characters of important people as well as Xhosa histories that would speak with vibrant immediacy to future readers.

Written izibongo tend to work against the detachment offered by print media by constantly engaging and exhorting readers as if they are present to the speaker. The powerful emotive styles of address inherent to izibongo as a form are principally responsible for the performative qualities of the poetry in print. A reader is



anonymous by definition, yet Manisi writes his readers in vivid ways: in his powerful izibongo for Mqhayi, published in his *Inguqu* collection, Manisi begins,

Hullo-o-o-o!!  
Listen, you great and honourable men  
Give us your ears nations of our land

And he goes on to demand:

I say wake up nations and watch  
Crowds of Lwaganda and Mlawu,<sup>4</sup>  
of he who speaks and zips his lips, of he who looks angry.  
You crowds of the one who makes news, ...  
Yes, you crowds of Passes, of Mountains  
...  
Join them crowds of Ntongakazi,<sup>5</sup>  
crowds of Ndaba<sup>5</sup> ... (Opland Collection: 540421.15)

In a long poem about Sabatha Dalindyebo, published in *Umthunywa* on 26 January 1952, Manisi orders: “Make way, Zondwas, for the nation’s calf’s entrance”, “Salute, Halas, the son of Sampu’s coming”, “Oh yes, Ndyebo people, I give you forewarning ...”. Exhortations, warnings and reminders addressed to specific groups, to collectives, to whole nations, permeate and energise the poem, militating against the conventional relationship of detachment between reader and text mandated by print media. The reason why readers retain their anonymity as well as their self-regulated attentiveness is that, as Michael Warner has pointed out, they do not constitute intimate communities or audiences in the sense of locatable gatherings. Rather, readers make up shifting publics whose relationships to one another are relations to discourses maintained by the circulation of texts (2002). According to Warner, “A public is a relation among strangers” (2002: 55). Nevertheless readers of newspaper and book izibongo are not easily allowed their solitariness or their anonymity – the poems read coercively, heaping specific identity on their readers.

Even in performance, izibongo are geared toward both public and intimate address. Although most izibongo are addressed to a particular person, like Manisi’s poems invoking Mathanzima and Sabatha, praise poems always also address their audiences. They are texts that position themselves at the interface between different

<sup>4</sup> Lwaganda and Mlawu are Xhosa chiefly ancestors.

<sup>5</sup> See Note on Genealogy.

addressees, as mediators between these groups. In a praise poem's dual address – of individual subject and broad audience – the second kind of address usually exceeds the limitations of the actual audience of a performance, calling an audience in terms of its local, national, tribal, continental, historical, political and other connections. Izibongo are thus simultaneously profoundly intimate – they embody and invoke their subjects – and broadly public. They function where the personal and the political intersect, and as such are peculiarly adaptable to mass media.

Although a particular performance izibongo does not circulate beyond its utterance, except through audience exegesis and discussion, it does participate in circulating public discourses, in terms of which its audiences receive its address. When izibongo are written, they become circulating texts whose audiences cannot be definitely identified or enumerated. The propensity at the heart of izibongo to address their receivers with thorough specificity works in slightly different ways in print and oral media, however: in performance, such modes of address open the audience out, expanding their identities beyond what is immediate in their gathering, connecting them in their imaginations to broader publics. In writing, these same terms of address narrow down the vast reading public into projected publics which, as Warner shows, either meet with readers' recognition (in which case they succeed) or do not (in which case, the poem is inefficacious).

Certain propensities in izibongo – for public address, for solidity and detachability – are emphasised by the form's deployment in print. However, the irrepressible energies and rhythms of izibongo, as well as their capacity for intimate, contextual address and immediacy of exhortation, work in writing against the usual print/performance binaries. The actual economies of print circulation qualify print ontology. However, these economies are not uniform: J. A. Lent discusses, for instance, the use of media like newspapers in poor and mainly illiterate communities where resources are shared (1979: 18). Newspapers in such contexts may be kept for long periods to accommodate successive readers. Literate community members often read segments of the newspaper to their family and friends who cannot read, and so if what is read aloud is something like Manisi's newspaper poetry, a form that has come to rest in print might be re-verbalised. This could also, of course, be true of books.

In Manisi's case, print runs of his poetry collections were always tiny and the chance of a poem circulating was slim. Harold Innis makes the useful distinction between time-binding and space-binding media: oral traditions are time-binding

inasmuch as speech travels poorly, but their contents can be treasured and taught to successive generations in rich narrative and poetic traditions; printing presses and newspapers are space-binding because they emphasise circulation across space (1951). In the category of time-binding media, Innis includes stone and clay inscriptions like Bushman paintings that do not travel but instead weather time and their environments, and remain as monuments and small portals of access to other times and worlds. Although both the newspaper and the book are primarily space-binding media, Manisi appears to have used the book as a time-binding instrument that would wait out uncertain days, a substitute for the shared memory of generations, presided over in more stable times by storytellers and iimbongi.

### **Poet of the declining chieftom: three written poems about Thembu chiefs**

An examination of three of Manisi's published poems about Thembu chiefs – the first two of which appeared in newspapers in 1952 and 1955 and the third of which was published in 1980 in *Yaphum' ingqina* – reveals the poet's changing relationship both to his political context and subjects and to his readers and the print media by which he appealed to them. The first poem, written to honour Sabatha Dalindyabo, was published in *Umtshunywa* on 26 January 1952. It is a lengthy poem that evidences – in its overriding sentiment, its copious application of valuable names, and its energetic rhythms – Manisi's strong support of the paramount chief of the Thembu nation. The poem marks the year in which Sabatha toured his territory and visited the Emigrant Thembu at Qamata (Opland 2005: 64). By 1952, the homeland scheme was under first-phase construction by apartheid architects, and already there was a question mark over Sabatha's succession to the Thembu throne. Yet, despite Mathanzima's growing popularity as a strong alternative for paramount leader of the proposed Transkei Bantustan, Manisi continued to consider his chief to be loyal to Sabatha. The poem testifies to Manisi's sense of himself as a spokesman for the broad Thembu nation, an identity that depended on the poet's belief in Mathanzima's loyal support of Sabatha. The second of the newspaper poems I shall discuss is about Mathanzima and was published in two instalments in *Umteteli* on 22 and 29 October 1955. The poem endures as a record of the final moments of Manisi's early attachment to his chief. Brimming with criticism and complexity, the izibongo nevertheless urges Mathanzima to rule fairly and decisively. Manisi's newspaper poems are concerned

with the poet's contemporary political contexts and exhort and encourage his subjects accordingly.

The third poem I shall discuss was written considerably later than the newspaper izibongo. Published in 1980 in his poetry collection, Manisi's poem for Manzezulu, a local Thembu chief of considerable significance to the poet, has a more historical focus than the 1950s newspaper poetry. I shall argue, in line with my discussions in this and the previous chapter, that the shift in focus and medium demonstrated by these three poems, when read together, suggests the poet's changing conception of his role as a publishing imbongi in contexts that increasingly separated him from contemporary publics. The 1980 izibongo on the subject of Manzezulu was published by an academic publisher and comes out of a period in Manisi's life when he was engaged in university work and performing mainly for academic audiences.

#### **i. *Umthunywa*, 1952**

Heading the 1952 poem for Sabatha is a short introduction written by Manisi to make present both the subject of the izibongo and its poet:

This is Honourable and Respected, Prince Sabatha  
(Hail, Watch the Nation) the son of Sampu (Hail,  
Watch the Country), son of Dalindyebo son of  
Ngangelizwe son of Mthikrakra. He is the true heir to  
the kingdom of all the Thembu. The poet then says  
about him: ... (65).

Having asserted the immediate presence of subject and poet, Manisi begins his izibongo by appealing to the wide Thembu nation for their permission to speak:

Allow me, Thembu, to say a word,  
to ask questions until I speak for myself  
about my chief, Dalindyebo's grandson,  
so that all the nations and peoples know  
that even we Thembu have our king.  
So then:  
Where's my chief, Watch the Country's son? (65)

The poet's opening request for authority and attention recalls the first poem he wrote in 1947 in which he asked for Mathanzima's and his people's permission to speak. In this poem, however, the poet's appeal is made to the entire Thembu nation – to the tacit and popular understanding, which Mathanzima would in future years undermine, that the Thembu regency spanned the borders that artificially separated Thembu people into Emigrant Thembu and Thembu Proper.

As a way of igniting the poem's rhythms and energies, the opening appeal identifies the poet as an imbongi who lays claim to the role of mediator and publicist among nations. While oral izibongo tend to refer to absent and historical audiences in addition to actual listeners, Manisi's concern to reveal the fact of Thembu regency to "all the nations and peoples" is emphasized by the capacity of the written newspaper poem to circulate beyond the confines of the performance space it initially imagines. As I have argued, one of the most attractive aspects of print in Manisi's view is its capacity for broadcasting local matters among distant audiences – that the opening of his poem for Sabatha explicitly anticipates a broad audience of appreciative onlookers who might not yet know of the Thembu kingdom, suggests the poet's investment in the circulating, publicising work of the newspaper medium.

Having named Sabatha with various epithets, Manisi ends the opening stanza with a question that goes to the heart of the context in which the poem was written:

Provider for the Halas,  
the son of a chief himself a chief.  
So who makes claims against him?  
So who lays claims to his father's goods? (65)

For Manisi, colonial intervention in Africa has had the effect of removing from indigenous communities their rightful inheritances – the inheritance of greatest value, certainly to Manisi, is that of land. The question of whether Sabatha would in fact inherit his rightful mantle as king of the Thembu, a question posed by Pretoria, threatened not only Thembu land, but also the Thembu nation's form of polity and custom of rightful succession.

In the second stanza, Manisi demands that Thembu communities acknowledge their prince, Sabatha, as Sampu's rightful heir. His exhortations have a quality of immediacy and active demand that leap at the reader from the page:

Make way, Zondwas, for the nation's calf's entrance,  
 great bull that sees other bulls,  
 it starts at the sea and ends on the Orange.  
 Salute, Halas, the son of Sampu's coming,  
 all of you say:- "Hail, Watch the Nation!"  
 Watch the Nation's the dark son of Watch the Country,  
 Starer watching the Eastern Thembu  
 to guard them from nations coveting property,  
 Maker of Majesty holds his west flank ... (65-66)

The stanza constitutes a powerful assertion of Thembu tradition and ownership against that which threatens them: in his statement "it starts at the sea and ends at the Orange", Manisi repeats his persistent claim that Thembu land rightfully stretches from the Indian ocean in the east to the Orange River in the west. He commands Thembu peoples to call out "Hail, Watch the Nation!", the traditional praise-name salutation accorded Sabatha, and then repeats the name immediately in the next line in which he names Sabatha's father, the king, with his traditional appellation, "Watch the Country". Manisi's repetition of the powerful praise names his subjects took at their circumcision is designed, just as when he proclaims them in performance, to infuse his audience with pride in their community and with a sense of obligation to their rightful rulers. The command to repeat a salutation out loud is given frequently in performance and is intended to attract a rousing response. Here, the urgency of the call is not diminished by its effective silence in print – the immediacy of an oral context is evoked in the strong rhythm and insistence of the imbongi's urgings.

The poem immediately reveals the poet's need to communicate an urgent message to his kinsmen readers: that a serious threat exists to the health of the Thembu nation as encapsulated and nourished by the figure of their paramount chief in waiting, Sabatha Dalindyabo. In retrospect, it is perhaps one of the poems bitterest ironies that Manisi repeatedly assures Watch the Country of Maker of Majesty's (Mathanzima's) protection and support. In the extract quoted above, Manisi asserts a partnership between the two Thembu chiefs, according to which Sabatha protects the eastern Thembu from thieves while Mathanzima does the same for the western Thembu – there is no sense in these lines that Mathanzima might covet the eastern Thembu and their goods for his own more selfish objectives. At this stage, according to Manisi, the threat comes solely from Pretoria, an opinion he makes explicit in the fourth stanza:

White-flecked red beast, Watch the Nation's son,  
 tough tree of Nomathokazi's home,  
 other nations could never twist it,  
 even the whites feared him,  
 nations feared him till they turned to the whites,  
 who lodged a complaint with Umtata magistrates  
 on the same day a letter was filed in Pretoria  
 with the great judges of Joubert's tribe.  
 A letter came back from the whites at twilight  
 denying the prince his rights:  
 that day we clasped our cheeks bereft at the graveside  
 as if Watch the Country had died only yesterday ... (66)

As part of the way in which izibongo work to empower their subjects, Manisi emphasises Sabatha's strength throughout the poem, and, in this extract, the threat he poses to weaker nations in their fearful estimation. That these weaker nations turn to Joubert's tribe – the whites whose power base is Pretoria – to take action against the Thembu prince, is where the main trouble lies, for, in Manisi's narrative insertion about a letter from the white magistrates, Sabatha is deprived of his rights by Pretoria and those who appeal to arbitrary white law. The act clearly oversteps the mark, leaving Thembu people as devastated as when their king died, but Manisi is careful to represent his prince's disempowerment as a result not of his weakness but his strength. The whites too feared Watch the Nation, and their fear is at the heart of their unjust decree.

There are other instances in the poem of small narrative insertions that demonstrate the ways in which Sabatha has confounded and tricked Joubert's tribe, intended both to build up the image of the prince and also to provide reasons for Pretoria's concern about the Thembu leader. In fact, so powerful and strong-willed is the prince in Manisi's sketch, that he even refused the wishes of his cousin, the older and educated Mathanzima, who wanted to send him to Lovedale to be schooled:

He wanted him sent to Stewart's Scots in Skirts  
 to sharpen his horns to also judge whites,  
 but Watch the Nation shuns the Vicious  
 early next morning he pulped the plan:  
 Maker of Majesty yielded and zipped his lips. (66-67)

As I suggested in Chapter One in relation to this extract, Manisi's sense that education sharpens one to judge or contend with whites was often countered by his loyalty to

tradition. Even if Manisi had hoped that Sabatha would pursue his Lovedale education, the poem does not criticise the prince, nor does it suggest that white concern with the prince is motivated by anything other than greed and fear of Sabatha's power – such reasoning shores up the poet's efforts to rally Thembu constituencies behind their prince on the grounds of national pride and traditional obligation. In this izibongo, the form's special capacity for appeal to tradition and to the long roots of tribal community are specially evident and are used to make strong, immediate appeals to specific communities of readers.

Manisi thanks Mathanzima in a later stanza for his support of Sabatha in a way that implies Maker of Majesty's ongoing duty, and hence the obligation of those in Mathanzima's chieftdom, to their prince. Manisi also thanks Sabatha for a list of virtuous actions that demonstrate to readers the prince's claim on their support:

Hail, [Watch the Country]!<sup>6</sup>  
 You've watched over the Thembu nation  
 You've watched over Dalindyebo's orphans  
 You watch over the helpless, you watch over the starving  
 You moving forest of Ntandeni  
 You road strewn with broken bottles  
 You stab to bring them together, the troublemaker does nothing.  
 (Opland Collection: 520126)

These praises conjoin the prince's actions to his public and personal identity – his names and his meaning as a person worthy of praise are constructed out of his efforts to protect the vulnerable. But the list ends in a warning to the reader: he who does nothing is a troublemaker, working against the unity for which the prince strives. The line, like the poem as a whole, is an exhortation to the reader to serve and support Sabatha in his capacity as rightful heir to the Thembu throne and in his fight against dispossession. Whereas the poem does not criticise the prince, it does criticise those Thembu people who fail to commit themselves to their nation's survival and prosperity. To this end, Manisi constantly badgers his readers with demands and questions.

The final stanza is particularly revealing of Manisi's purpose in writing the izibongo:

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<sup>6</sup> In the Opland Collection, Jonguhlanga is left untranslated. I have translated it here so that this extract is consistent with the other extracts from the same poem that I have quoted from *The Dassie*.



Peace, fair paleskin of the Mpondo girl,<sup>7</sup>  
 I'm not praising you, prince, I'm setting you free:  
 I praised Mhlobo's darkskin below Mngqanga  
 and he purged the thugs' tents at Mvuzo's<sup>8</sup> kraal.  
 On that day we laughed revealing our premolars  
 for the thugs had hugged themselves with glee  
 saying Joubert's gang owned the country not us  
 ...  
 Permit me, my chief, to conclude  
 for we have a great day before us  
 the day you're handed Ngangelizwe's stick  
 empowering you to try cases:  
 you point with it to make law  
 I serve you, son of a king,  
 ... (67-68)

Manisi's contention that his poem sets Sabatha free, just as another izibongo had secured victory for Mathanzima over white thugs, suggests the poet's sense that his written izibongo is efficacious, capable of acting as invocation and as a strong source of empowerment. In the Mathanzima izibongo, presumably an oral poem, Manisi had, he contends, empowered Mathanzima to outwit Joubert's gang, and to prove that the country to which whites had laid claim is not in dispute – it belongs to the Thembu. The comparison is evident: Manisi wants his poem to be read as a source of power against the threats from Pretoria that Sabatha might not be allowed to succeed to the throne, and that the people might be prevented from sharing in their rightful inheritance and their land. The last few lines indicate that the poem has done its work: Sabatha will receive the stick, a symbol for power, and will make Thembu law. It is a powerful ending, confirming the poet's commitment and the prince's credentials, and implicitly pitting the unjust law represented by Pretoria against the rightful, inherited law wielded by Sabatha.

The poem's immediacy of demand and exhortation, together with its references to current politics and forthcoming events, position the speaker in the middle of contemporary affairs. There is a sense of urgency in the izibongo and of concern with people's loyalties and actions that suggest the extent of Manisi's investment in the newspaper form as a vehicle for the transmission of his urgent

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<sup>7</sup> Mathanzima's mother was a member of the Mpondo, a group (like the Thembu) which formed part of the larger Xhosa collective.

<sup>8</sup> Mvuzo was Mathanzima's father.

message to Thembu people. It is also clear that Manisi sees no obstacle to the achievement in print of praise poetry's capacity for transformation, empowerment and nation building. In fact, the powers to which Manisi lays claim in this poem, and in the izibongo for Mathanzima, never reveal themselves – Sabatha is deposed and exiled, and Mathanzima plays dupe to, rather than outwits, "Joubert's gang". The poet's assertion of the efficacy of his izibongo is necessary to his sense of his agency and connection with his audiences, whether in print or in oral contexts. There is tragic irony in the fact that, at their most confident and urgent, Manisi's written poems are among his least potent izibongo.

## ii. *Umteteli*, 22 October and 29 October 1955

Published in two parts in *Umteteli* in 1955, the year he left his chief's court, Manisi's last newspaper izibongo for Mathanzima is much more enigmatic and ambiguous in its epithets, narratives, tone and imagery than the 1952 poem for Sabatha. In the intervening three years between the two poems' publications, Mathanzima had made it clear that he would pursue all means to increase his power in the Transkei region. Although the poem makes a cursory, belated gesture towards the relationship between Mathanzima and Sabatha, there is nothing emphatic or celebratory in the reference – Manisi merely hints at a visit Mathanzima pays Sabatha. Significantly, however, the poet uses the episode not to exhort cooperation between the two Thembu leaders, but rather to confirm that Sabatha is "the handsome Novoti's son, the son of Sampu/ the nation's son of Ndilo/ whose real name is Jonguhlanga" (Opland Collection: 551029). There is unequivocal support for Sabatha in Manisi's reminder to his readers of their prince's lineage; speaking about Mathanzima, on the other hand, the poet is guarded, focusing on exhortation and criticism.

In the 22 October instalment of the 1955 poem, Manisi wastes little time before pursuing one of his main criticisms of his chief:

Trasher of weeds, Nogate's tower of a son  
 Overseer that provokes the rhebok  
 he dispatches the white trash as they mock one another,  
 Grandeur disagreeing with Hottentots  
 he angers the magistrates when he answers them back  
 he has lovely sticks of the mouth  
 devourer of the whites' books

to judge nobles and friends  
to judge whites in turn.

Discussion is foreign to Mhlobo's son  
he spoils trials by judging even the nobles  
Oh dear, this chief of the Hala!  
herdsmen of stricken cattle.

...

Mountains dividing Halas and whites  
though the whites have claimed the land  
for they spread across the western section  
so the people become their servants.  
... (Opland Collection: 551022)

Mathanzima's aggression and intelligence are potentially positive – both qualities provoke white magistrates – but are applied indiscriminately by the chief against enemies, nobles and friends alike so that great offence is caused to traditional institutions of decision-making and consultation. To offend the nobles, and so to spoil trials, is destructive and despotic behaviour, and earns Mathanzima the title, “Herdsmen of stricken cattle” to suggest the people's dire need as well as the perils of their chief's autocratic style of leadership. Manisi's allegations that Mathanzima has failed to comply with traditional institutions of democracy go to the very heart of the contract between chief and polity, and by extension that between chief and imbongi: if the chief refuses advice and ignores tradition and convention, the poet of the polity cannot move him.

Although on the surface of things, Manisi follows this sharp criticism of Mathanzima with a lamentation directed elsewhere (he remarks on the fact that whites have invaded Hala land and made servants of the people), the underlying sentiment may be a criticism of Mathanzima for not only allowing, but also indeed aiding white incursion. Whether or not this is so – and it is difficult to tell given the pervasive ambiguity that characterises the poem – Manisi is distressed by the state of the Hala nation and its territory under Mathanzima's coercive leadership. It is not that the poet lacks faith in Mathanzima's potential as a leader: in the penultimate stanza of the 22 October instalment, Manisi reminds the reader that Mathanzima would “raise humps if carried piggyback/ but the great one struts preening on his own”. Manisi despairs of Mathanzima's disavowal of the people's advice and assistance, and the chief's overriding pride and concern with self-aggrandisement.

The first instalment of the 1955 poem ends with a stanza in which Manisi, despite acknowledging the extent to which Mathanzima has abandoned him personally, nevertheless exhorts the chief to lead more effectively and justly:

He's Nogate's aristocrat who decks out his relatives,  
 if I were handsome I'd look after the calves  
 but my chief has handed me over to Bolonisi  
 so I left home and went to whites.  
 Give orders, Mhlobo's son, today it's your turn  
 the nation perishes having no doctor  
 a doctor knowing prudent tactics  
 give orders, prince, you hold the sticks now.  
 (Opland Collection: 551022)

It is unusual for Manisi to refer negatively to his personal relationship with his chief, but here he makes the point that Mathanzima has failed to support him and that because he has had to seek employment among whites, he cannot do the job of caring for the nation, figured here as 'calves' – an image that stands for the sacred community as a whole, those both living and dead, since cattle operate as the communication line between people and their ancestors. The first line suggests the nepotism involved in Mathanzima's leadership. Transkei politics was long dominated by Kaiser, his brother, George, and friends sympathetic to their agenda. These lines explain to the reader that Manisi can no longer be the outspoken poet of the Hala – their chief has made such a task impossible.

The poem is a kind of farewell, one of several efforts made by Manisi to break from his constituency. But true to his task as imbongi, Manisi does not relent – Mathanzima remains the true heir of the western Thembu, Mhlobo's son, and as such he is entreated to deal more honestly and prudently with his ailing nation, and to help his people back to health. In the second instalment of the poem, published on 29 October 1955, Manisi explains: "I'm not praising you son of Mhlobo I encourage you/ for the bull is encouraged by those of his home". In Chapter Three, I shall argue that it is Manisi's deep attachment to home, his sense of responsibility to the fact as he sees it that one cannot abandon one's home, that causes him to return from time to time, when events at home seem to press at him, to his chief's side despite the stand he makes in leaving Mathanzima's court in 1955.

The 29 October instalment continues the poem's heaviness of tone, and completes what is in total a very short izibongo, especially when compared to the

1952 poem for Sabatha. The second episode of the 1955 poem for Mathanzima starts with an exhortation of the chief to prevent the abuse of Hala girls who have been employed as domestic servants:

O the white adulterers eye Xhosa girls  
 yet we don't even hear the smell of their girls  
 open the door, Mhlobo's son, for us to enter  
 whip the sun, boy, and drive it out of the clouds  
 tell men today to stop holding back  
 erupt and stop our girls' work as domestics  
 it's only a ruse to abuse them  
 so they give birth to wildcats and monkeys.  
 (Opland Collection: 551029)

There is a militancy in this appeal that had not before appeared in Manisi's published izibongo – the moderate approach of his earlier work had been disappointed not least by Mathanzima's failure to act in the best interests of his own people. What is interesting about Manisi's appeal here is its broad concern with domestic labour as a white plot to weaken the Xhosa. In the poem as a whole, although the poet is focused on Mathanzima's failure of his Hala constituency, there is concern with the racist plots of apartheid South Africa: in the first instalment, white magistrates and whites' invasion of indigenous land are invoked as causes for special concern, and in the second part of the izibongo, Manisi highlights the problem of black domestic labour, however compromised his position might be by his sexist terms of reference. These areas of focus would have had much to say to *Umteteli's* broad Johannesburg readership.

Although the direct appeal of the poem is aimed at Mathanzima, there is also a sense in which in this izibongo the poet is documenting his withdrawal from a chief who will not allow him to function as he feels he should be allowed to. The poem is an explanation to a broad Xhosa readership of the ailing state of affairs in Emigrant Thembuland; it is also a call to resistance against white exploitation, and a farewell from the poet to his immediate readership, on the grounds that he cannot operate as imbongi in circumstances in which traditional protections against the abuse of power are no longer observed by traditional leaders.

### iii. *Yaphum' ingqina*, 1980

At the same time that Manisi wrote poetry for newspaper submission, he also wrote for book publication. I began this dissertation by quoting from the poet's 1954 izibongo for Nelson Mandela, a prescient poem that documents Manisi's excitement about a young activist whom he calls "Gleaming Road". The poem is striking in its urgency and is full of exhortation in the manner of an oral performance. There is certainly a sense in the poem of the poet's desire to engage with the figure of Mandela and with the kind of future he promises South Africa. The poem also reveals an optimism, that would not endure, about the immediate reach of his written poetry – like his early newspaper izibongo, many of Manisi's poems in *Inguqu* exude confidence in their immediate mode of address, imagining response in their wake. Even those poems offered as commemoration, such as the poem remembering Mqhayi from which I have quoted extensively in this and the previous chapter, expect much of their receivers and construct readers in highly specific ways, narrowing down rather than opening out the publics they might reach. The Mqhayi poem offers an interesting moment of intersection in that it addresses potential readers intimately, and yet it is also clearly intended as an enduring monument to the Xhosa nation's greatest poet. Having demanded response from readers, such as "Do you hear you person of Bunguni,/ You man of my own country?", the last stanza is expressly elegiac, written to preserve Mqhayi in the nation's imagination. He urges the daughters, singers, poets, chiefs and ministers of the nation to use their modes of public and oral expression – the song and the sermon, for example – to remember Mqhayi to people. The concluding lines of the poem place in the stone of print Manisi's hope that the stone under which Mqhayi is buried will be durable, and will preserve and provide a resting place for Mqhayi's bones:

Endure, homeland mountain,  
live forever in glory,  
survive the nation's quakes,  
so those bones rest undisturbed,  
for they are the bones of a paragon,  
the peerless son of Mqhayi.  
Let it be so! Let it be so! (70)

Although the poem was published when Mqhayi's burial and death were matters of contemporary literary and national interest, the final stanza has an epitaph-like quality: it addresses a moment as well as an eternity.

The last of the three poems on which the present comparison focuses appeared 26 years after Manisi's 'Mandela' and 'Mqhayi' poems. In 1980, when *Yaphum' ingqina* received publication, uncertainties about legitimate black response to apartheid's application had long resolved into coherent positions, the most popularly valid of which was the urban-led programme of civil unrest and mass action. The moderate positions of the 1950s had little appeal in circumstances of aggravated racial hostility and state brutality. By 1980, Transkei had been formally independent for four years and Manisi had published a long poem celebrating the homeland's prospects. *Inkululeko* was addressed to the hopes of the black inhabitants of Transkei who might now live free of apartheid's stifling control. It was a poem about which, as I suggested in Chapter One, Manisi was to feel considerable shame – in its desperate optimism the poem failed to acknowledge that Transkei's 'independence' and leaders depended upon and served apartheid South Africa.

It is possible to read the publication as evidence of Manisi's efforts to address his countrymen and their leaders in terms of the irreversible choices they had already made, and as proof of the overwhelming sense of responsibility Manisi felt to the place of his birth. Undoubtedly the poem also represents a moment of desperate desire and rebellion on the poet's part – rebellion against the terrible complexities of Transkei's complicity with apartheid, and against the no-win situation for proposed homelands in terms of which a nominal independence seemed, at least in prospect, better than battling on as part of a detested corner of South Africa. The crystallisation of the homeland scheme – best represented by Transkei, its flagship operation – did much to destroy the legitimacy of chieftainship in popular black imagination, as I shall discuss in greater detail in the next chapter.

Transkei's complicity with Pretoria, people's failing faith in chiefs, and the actual distortion of chieftaincy by figures like Mathanzima, increasingly distanced Manisi from his contemporary audiences. Manisi could not use the Africanist strains in his izibongo to denounce chieftaincy or tradition, and this made his poetry susceptible to judgement by the urban protest ideologies of the day as being ineffective and out of touch with black needs in apartheid South Africa. As a person who believed strongly in the merit and sacred promise of chieftaincy, as well as in the

potential of education to free black South Africans, Manisi's position remained conservative even if also, in the long term, enduring and challenging. The third poem I shall discuss in relation to the early newspaper poetry about Thembu chiefs is an izibongo for Chief Mthikrakra, hailed as Manzezulu, which expresses Manisi's abiding concern with rightful and righteous leadership and his support for the contentious restoration of his inherited constituency to Manzezulu. The fierce debate surrounding Manzezulu's succession and the restoration of the district over which he presided echoes a general failure of faith in traditional leadership.

Manzezulu succeeded belatedly, in 1967, to the chieftaincy of the Glen Grey district, the area in which Manisi lived. The succession was controversial because the Glen Grey district, which had been part of Emigrant Thembuland, was restored to the Thembu by Pretoria almost a century after its dissolution in 1877. In that year, the incumbent chief of Glen Grey, Mfanta, had joined the final frontier war on the side of the Xhosa against white colonials. Mfanta was captured and imprisoned on Robben Island where he died and was buried. Almost a century later, many Thembu felt angry and suspicious about the restoration of the Glen Grey chieftaincy because it was perceived as one of the many self-serving measures undertaken by the apartheid government in rural areas; by implication, Manzezulu was tainted for many of his constituents as one of Pretoria's chiefs. Manisi produced several oral poems in which he exhorted Thembu acceptance of Manzezulu on the grounds that he was Mfanta's legitimate heir.

Opland provides an account of two of these oral poems about Manzezulu, and compares them with the 1980 *Yaphum' ingqina* poem written around the same subject. The first of the oral poems was performed on 19 August 1976 for an audience of six, comprising two American scholars, a research assistant, Opland, Manzezulu and the headman of a nearby district. The poem focuses on the difficulties faced by Manzezulu in winning the support of his people, who have to their own detriment refused to support their chief wholeheartedly. Manisi devotes considerable energy in the poem to a description of the injustice served upon Mfanta by the English, demonstrating that the roots of Manzezulu's present predicament lie in a long history of colonial treachery. In one of the most haunting moments of Manisi's recorded performance career, the poet declaims:



they seized Mthikrakra's Xhiba<sup>9</sup> child --  
 oh, the lisping Brits! --  
 they just dumped him on Robben Island.  
 This is the chief we cherish,  
 for we've yet to give birth, and take Manzezulu  
 to reclaim the bones of the son of a chief,  
 to return from the Island appeasing the dead.  
 Other chiefs have all been appeased,  
 right down to the least significant:  
 oh, how tragic the bones of Mfanta!<sup>10</sup> (134)

For Manisi, true restoration depends on the return of Mfanta's bones, buried unceremoniously in the foreign soil of Robben Island, to Glen Grey where they can be reburied with due ritual and respect. What Manisi wants his listeners to understand is that the matter is not as straightforward as Pretoria's restoration of the Glen Grey chieftaincy. The government also owes a more profound return – of bones, of dignity, of the warrant of honourable chieftaincy – that will not serve its own ends.

The second oral poem Opland discusses was produced at Transkei's Independence celebrations, one of three that Manisi would perform on that occasion. The poem hails Manzezulu, but gives most of its attention to the history of Xhosa dispossession at the hands of English and Afrikaner greed. Opland points out that the contentious figure of Mfanta is not mentioned in the poem (1998: 156). In the 1980 poem published in *Yaphum' ingqina*, only slightly more attention is given to Mfanta in a passing one-line reference to his death on Robben Island. Summing up his discussion, Opland argues, "[t]he significant differences in the three poems are attributable to their modes of transmission and to their audiences, real or imagined. The written poem is tightly controlled and politically muted" (1998: 155). The 1980 izibongo, Opland contends, was part of a book written in the hope of prescription in black schools and is conscious, therefore, "of a wider audience beyond the confines of the Glen Grey chieftaincy" (1998: 156). It is because of this wider audience, according to Opland, that Manisi "suppresses mention of the implications of Mfanta's death" (1998: 156). Opland's comparison shows that Manisi's poetry yields different products depending on its conditions of expression: in the first oral poem, for example, the intimate audience enabled the poet to "speak his mind in spontaneous

<sup>9</sup> The Xhiba House produced advisors to the paramount line.

<sup>10</sup> Mfanta was the son of Mthikrakra in the Xhiba House.

poetry” and to produce “a poem that exposed raw nerves at the very heart of the Glen Grey chiefdom” (1998: 156). On this analysis, Manisi offers little outspoken criticism in his written izibongo, because he foresees an impending, intermediate audience of censors.

In the written 1980 poem, Manisi begins by addressing Manzezulu, establishing his identity in terms of his physical appearance and his ancestry. Next, he entreats “Crowds of Ndaba” to inspire Manzezulu with energy, which is a clear exhortation of Thembu readers to support their leader. Manisi records the joy of the landscape in response to Manzezulu’s presence as chief: a flourishing, green land greets his restoration to the chiefdom. But nations are wary:

All the nations screened their eyes  
saying, what will come of this?  
Make space, you Gcina,<sup>11</sup>  
and let the handsome one of Mfanta enter;  
Mfanta is greater than Tyhopho  
for he’s born of Mthikrakra,  
beloved heir of the Thembu.  
Why do you grumble?  
Do you say Mfanta should not have fought?  
It’s Gungubele who caused the trouble,  
of all the princes Mfanta joined in,  
helping his blood from Thukwa’s place.  
Gungubele’s the son of Maphasa<sup>12</sup>, son of Mvanxeni,  
Mvanxeni’s the son of Xhoba of the Tshatshu<sup>13</sup>.  
When Gungubele stabbed at Gwatyu,  
when the lipping English seized what was his,  
Mfanta sallied forth without taking counsel,  
at the head of his own of the Xhiba House,  
and the whites were assailed from all sides,  
and warriors fell on both sides,  
but because the whites used thunder to fight,  
Nxeko’s<sup>13</sup> forces retreated,  
so Mfanta died on Robben Island.  
Did you gentlemen think he bore no heir?  
Didn’t you see this long-limbed plant,  
a chief handsome as a water snake?  
...  
All of Glen Grey’s his stamping ground,<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> One of the two non-Thembu tribes that had joined the Emigrant Thembu in seeking the territory that became known as Emigrant Thembuland.

<sup>12</sup> Maphasa joined the Xhosa side in the War of the Axe, fought against colonials between 1846 and 1847.

<sup>13</sup> See Note on Genealogy.

for it's Zondwa's and Ndaba's:  
 Bawana<sup>15</sup> was first to blaze that trail  
 right up to the Winterberg,  
 clearing the way for Hala's royal house.  
 Ask Xhoba's Tshatshu,  
 they're the first of the nation to settle there.  
 I refer to you then, Mfanta's tall one,  
 herdsmen of the crippled cattle of Ndaba,  
 who flames in walking like the sun.  
 Bring us rain, son of Mfanta, we're starving,  
 how much longer must we screen our eyes?  
 For the land and the rivers are waste  
 And all the streams run dry.  
 Point, rule, we're waiting for you,  
 my chief of Xonxa<sup>16</sup> and Glen Grey.  
 I disappear! (Opland Collection: 80.21)

Much of the poem documents a particular history, one that focuses not on Mfanta's death but rather on his decision to take part in the frontier war. Although Opland points to Manisi's muted reference to Mfanta's death, the poet is clearly critical of Gungubele's dispossession by the English. It is the injustice of this dispossession that, in Manisi's history, accounts for and justifies Mfanta's involvement, even if that involvement was decided without counsel. Manisi goes on to challenge readers on the question of Mfanta's line – Mfanta's heroic death in the face of more powerful English weaponry did not constitute an end for his line or for his claim. In asserting Manzezulu's historical claim to chieftaincy, Manisi also demonstrates Glen Grey's historical ownership by the Thembu nation. The bulk of the poem is thus documentation of historical ownership and claim. It stands as a corrective to disgruntled local narratives about the chieftdom as well as to apartheid versions of events that cast the 1967 revival of the Glen Grey District as a magnanimous act of government. Direct appeals to audience are for their recognition of the history with which the poet presents them. It is only at the end that Manisi returns to an immediate context of writing in his appeal to Manzezulu to take up his responsibilities and rescue his people from their state of privation.

It is true, as Opland asserts, that Manisi had to write in a more circumspect manner if indeed he intended his book to receive school prescription. One of the many

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<sup>14</sup> The District of Glen Grey comprised Emigrant Thembuland and additional land granted the Emigrant Thembu by Sir George Cathcart.

<sup>15</sup> Bawana was another name for Mvanxeni.

<sup>16</sup> Xonxa was the Thembu name for Glen Grey.

barriers to the ostensible audience of Manisi's address in the Manzezulu poem, then, is his awareness of the censorious reception of school inspectors and government officials. But, as I have argued in this chapter, there were many other barriers between Manisi and the audiences he addressed in his book poetry. The historical-corrective focus in the Manzezulu poem suggests the poet's hopes in the present, but equally his investment in future readers who must learn their history once more, in circumstances in which the power and legitimacy of chiefs may truly be retrieved. Manisi's later books might have been written with some degree of hope in their school prescription, but perhaps the greater hope invested in the books is for a future audience of educated Xhosa readers.

Opland reveals that after listening to the recording of his outspokenly critical 19 August 1976 poem for Manzezulu, Manisi had "laughed humourlessly, and remarked that I [Opland] had better not publish the poem" (1998: 144). Beyond his wariness about censorship, however, Manisi considered print a place for rational argument rather than for angry eruption – when he transcribed his own work, for example, he never recorded the obscene words he had spoken in spontaneous performance leaving them for Opland's editorial reinsertion. To some extent this sense of print, as a permanent, scholarly space, accounts for the more reserved tone of the poet's book *izibongo*. After he became affiliated to university institutions in the late 1970s, Manisi found a new, short-lived authority as a writer who also had claim to humble academic employment.

In his 1982 newspaper poem for academic Z. S. Qangule, Manisi manages a vibrant immediacy of address that grows out of his sense of authority in talking about scholarship. He speaks directly to his countrymen and indeed to wide-ranging black communities in South Africa, exhorting them to see black intellectuals like Qangule as their common treasures. It had always been the poet's central argument that education was the necessary weapon against dispossession and injustice, but the theme had been underdeveloped in his address of failing chieftaincy in his poems for Mathanzima and other chiefs. It is telling that Manisi signs the Qangule poem: "D. L. P. Manisi, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, Grahamstown". In this poem, Manisi avoids the terrible complexities of speaking as a poet of the discredited chieftaincy – where much of Manisi's book poetry published after he left Mathanzima's court seems to speak to audiences across great spiritual distances, in the Qangule poem Manisi appeals to his countrymen directly, assuming

and encouraging their spiritual proximity to his way of seeing the world. In this expansive newspaper poem, Manisi seems to have managed for once to balance his concerns for Xhosa advancement and for black education. Yet the academic community itself proved unreachable by way of print.

**“We must say these things to see eye to eye”: “iRhodes” and the conflicted address of the academic poet**

In 1979, after he had spent a short time at Rhodes University as Traditional Artist in Residence, Manisi submitted a long written poem to Opland for his consideration. It is a poem that tries to communicate directly and immediately with the academic community of which the poet had briefly been a part, but it also aims to stand as a kind of historical corrective, in much the same way as the 1980 poem for Manzezulu had sought to compete with other less credible histories. The poem accuses white South Africans, represented by the Rhodes community, whose ancestor C. J. Rhodes had won so much for his people, of having inherited the bulk and the best of the land, leaving black people destitute and despairing. It also pointedly accuses its readers of keeping black nations from decent education while they grow fat off learning’s yield. The poem goes into considerable depth on the subject of colonial incursion, naming specific historical protagonists and detailing their unjust dealings with Xhosa indigenes.

In its historical revisionism, the poem unrelentingly castigates English and Boer colonials for their oppression of blacks:

Black oppression escalated,  
 one hardship piled on another,  
 every right was revoked,  
 access to land denied,  
 no peace or consultation –  
 command and control reigned supreme,  
 and the blacks were left shrivelled up,  
 victims of privation,  
 scrounging for scraps and crumbs.  
 Rubusana capered and wailed,  
 witness to shame and disgrace,  
 he took Dalindyebo over the sea,  
 to visit the great place of England,  
 to lodge a complaint with those in charge,  
 complaining of land and rule.  
 Even there they returned empty-handed,

for Britain no longer held power,  
 other bulls held this land –  
 the sons of Botha and Smuts,  
 the sons of Hertzog and Sauer,  
 the sons of Steyn and Merriman<sup>17</sup> ... (212)

The account of Rubusana and Dalindyebo's trip to England refers to the many Xhosa deputations that were sent abroad to appeal to the British monarch for the return of land and rights to blacks. Manisi emphasises that Xhosa attempts to win back their land and dignity have failed because of the duplicity of white rulers: colonials, having plundered African territory, have deserted their colonies and left South Africa to Afrikaner rule. Despite Manisi's association of his academic addressees with colonial and apartheid rule, however, the poet lapses constantly in "iRhodes" into conciliatory appeals, such as:

Greetings, sirs, calves of nobles!  
 Straight talk never breaks friendship,  
 we must say these things to see eye to eye,  
 to see eye to eye and reach common ground;  
 enmity's ended, ill-will is ended,  
 we lick your wounds, you bathe our gashes,  
 bound together we share our burdens,  
 immune to rogues and robbers. (209-210)

Even here, in his poem for an audience he envisages as receptive, Manisi has to cultivate his readers' indulgence and explain himself thoroughly. The impulse to correct history and to leave a record of events from the Xhosa perspective jeopardises the immediate, conciliatory address of the poem, even though the history Manisi provides is intended to obligate his readers to remedy matters by sharing education and goodwill with their black countrymen. Ultimately, Opland decided against the poem's publication – it is an ungainly poem interspersed with many struggling interludes of apology and repetition that do not advance the poet's arguments or benefit his address of his ex-colleagues. In trying on the one hand to outline, and detail in parts, a long history of white-black relations in southern Africa, while on the

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<sup>17</sup> Louis Botha was the first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa (1910-1919); Jan Smuts was twice Prime Minister of the Union (1919-1924 and 1939-1948); J. M. B. Hertzog was Prime Minister between 1924 and 1939; Sauer piloted the Natives Land Act (1913) through Parliament; Steyn was President of the Orange Free State (a Boer Republic before its incorporation in the Union of South Africa in 1910) between 1899 and 1902; Merriman was Prime Minister of the Cape Colony between 1908 and 1910.

other, to seek camaraderie and political help from his contemporary academic audience, Manisi overburdens his long poem with the persistent contradiction of severe criticism and over-sweet praise.

The manuscript remnant stands as testimony to the poet's extraordinary difficulty in reaching audiences not just through print but through performance as well. In a revealing stanza, the poet laments the obstacles to his being heard:

Oh! Powers I have beneath my assessment!  
I thought I could speak but I found myself tongue-tied!  
If only I had a thousand mouths,  
to speak in each nook of the land,  
by those on the twilight border of ignorance,  
for many indeed are the troublemakers,  
who rouse a state of dissension,  
wrapped in the blanket of race ...  
(Opland Collection: 790731.2)

Manisi's insight is that the great impediment to his speaking and writing freely as an imbongi in all the corners of the land is the eclipsing politics of race that blinds apartheid South Africa to all other forms of identity and struggle. Indeed, when he tried to speak as poet of the historical chieftdom, Manisi found his audiences turning from him, refusing to hear his pleas for restored legitimacy and for return to the proper spirit of chieftaincy. In the 1950s, and especially after he had left his chief's court, Manisi's audiences inclined more and more toward the importance of the race struggle, and repudiated discredited ethnicity. He too, feeling unable to address discredited chiefs in discredited terms, sought refuge in academic involvement where he enjoyed flashes of authority, but was finally always a compromised and largely unheeded guest. What is evident in his later written poetry, when compared to the confidence and immediacy of his early newspaper and book poetry, is a concern with correcting history so that if the bits of paper on which his poems were published did not reach immediate audiences, they might at least testify one day, in more amiable times when the race binary was overcome, to the proper spirit of leadership and community as well as the revisionist history at the heart of Manisi's literary commitments.

The dual possibilities in print izibongo for immediate, invocatory address and for enduring, latent appeal allowed Manisi to shift his publishing agenda in response to his increasingly uncongenial context of writing. It is perhaps indicative of the

general failure of his written poetry to reach his immediate audiences and reconcile his political concerns that Manisi's least successful izibongo, the unpublished "iRhodes", attempts communication with a contemporary, educated audience in a hybrid poetics that reflects white and black exchange – a Xhosa oral genre, resounding with the authority of the political imbongi, adapted to the print medium and conventions brought by white colonials, the descendants of whom the poem addresses. As with his politics, according to which he refused to advance his Africanist position at the expense of loyalty to tradition and chieftdom, the poet's insistence on writing in Xhosa and about the moment of colonial contact rather than directly about apartheid reduced his appeal in the eyes of prospective radical publishers and of readers. As the "iRhodes" poem so strikingly demonstrates, in contrast to its textual experimentalism, Manisi's writing is conservative at heart, yearning at once after a world that was lost with the arrival of colonials and after a conciliatory way forward with their descendants.

After the 1950s, print came to represent to Manisi the attractive possibility of preservation and safekeeping. In the pages of books, great treasure could wait out threatening days. In many of his izibongo, Manisi speaks of a forest in which black sticks are preserved in safety. He argues that the time will come when these sticks are retrieved and the power they represent returned to black nations. It is an image appropriate to the poet's conception of his own writing – in this case, the forests of paper that brutally displaced Xhosa land become once more the forests of safekeeping praised by the poet. Future audiences, if they materialise, might treat Manisi's contradictory impulses, conservative politics and attachment to a faded intellectual world with greater sensitivity than the cold disregard shown his written art by the publishing houses and urban liberation cause of his day. Reading from within a new political dispensation, contemporary audiences might value Manisi's written corpus for the insights it provides into an embattled literary history and for the relevance to the post-apartheid context of its concerns with education, land restitution, the restoration of the rural polity and the question of how to live in a multicultural society.



### Chapter Three

#### **Manisi's Performance at Transkei's 'Independence': The Failure of the 'Natural' Performance Context**

In Chapters One and Two, I argued that Manisi's written poetry emerged out of an increasingly oppressive political and publishing context, and that the poet's book address of future readerships was less critical and immediate than that mandated by the poetic licence accorded to the imbongi in more democratic circumstances. The contorted stanzas of the 'iRhodes' poem, which failed to reach its intended academic readership, bear mute testimony to Manisi's manifold publishing frustrations. Principal among these were his isolation from a publishing community of Xhosa intellectuals, his failure to reach the audiences he wished to engage, and his difficulty in writing in terms that had been corrupted by the dominant politics. If political writing demands the freedom to revitalise discourse, then this was the freedom denied Manisi by his censors and his desired national audience. That Manisi continued to write in such circumstances might be regarded as highly 'unnatural' or abnormal. But, like the poet himself, we tend to believe in the possibility of recuperating and detaching written texts from their contexts of production. This is not how we think of oral texts and their contexts.

Distinctions are often made in studies of oral traditions between performance texts created in 'natural' contexts and those produced in 'unnatural' circumstances. This is because the shape and content of oral texts depend on the opportunities and limitations of peopled contexts, and encode within themselves their circumstances of production and reception. Categories of contextual naturalness or abnormality evidence critical concern with the local realities of performance: elements like event, audience composition and mood. The effect of politics is usually inadequately explained in accounts of particular performance contexts. Especially in relation to the deployment of political forms like izibongo in circumstances of coercion and isolation, such as those in which Manisi wrote and performed, a micro focus on the material context easily misleads by claiming that the poet produces in 'natural' circumstances, when in fact, in Manisi's case, his terms of expression are shackled to the dominant politics and his conventional licence is compromised by a totalizing political horizon.

In the Introduction, I outlined the categories agreed by Opland and Manisi to provide a theoretical framework for the poet's archived performance texts. 'Performance' describes those poems produced at political events or in social contexts in which Manisi's impulse was to comment spontaneously on, or contribute ritually or ceremonially to, proceedings. The audiences of 'performance' comprehend Manisi's language, and share his familiarity with, and something of his expertise in, his literary genre. They also participate in textual production by demanding competence of the performer and by demonstrating their critical capacity as judges of performance. 'Demonstrations', by contrast, describe poems produced in academic contexts as examples of the Xhosa literary form. Composed for uncomprehending audiences at gatherings manufactured for the production of example and its examination, these texts stand in for the real and are fundamentally different from their authentic, 'performance' templates because of the 'unnatural' character of their circumstances of, and purpose in, production. In the category of 'demonstration', Opland and Manisi include all poems commissioned for class and conference production and analysis. Although they do not explicitly categorise performances requested by Opland in the early years of his fieldwork, these too appear to meet their 'demonstration' criteria.

Part Two of this thesis examines Manisi's archived 'demonstrations' in detail, and argues that our understanding of the poems the poet produced in academic contexts is poorly served by the idea that they merely represent, rather than deploy, his political genre. In the present chapter, however, I shall interrogate the category of the 'natural', in which performance is understood to be efficacious. Whereas the term 'demonstration' connotes compromised textuality and the absence of performativity other than the production of similitude, 'performance' implies the accomplishment, according to convention, of a communicative act or ritual. In 'performance' contexts, the presence or absence of a researcher and her/his technologies of recording is immaterial to, or at most simply part of, the event and its texts, whereas 'demonstrations' are conscious and exist because of research or teaching imperatives. In 'natural', 'performance' contexts, the imbongi mediates between appropriate groups by fulfilling one or more of his conventional functions, and may keep silence or interject as he pleases according to his privilege. 'Demonstrations' are motivated, timetabled, consumed and fossilised by fieldwork or research agendas. While there is consensus that texts produced in contrived circumstances are ontologically problematic and merit special critical treatment, categories like 'normal', 'natural' or

'regular' are applied to texts, contexts and audiences that are apparently uncompromised.

The Opland Collection contains two sets of 'performances' produced by Manisi for 'regular' audiences in 'natural' event contexts. The first of these sets was composed at the University of Fort Hare in 1974, on the occasion of Mathanzima's reception of an honorary doctorate. The second set, on which this chapter focuses, comprises three poems performed at intervals in the official celebration of Transkei's 'independence', in Umtata on 26 November 1976. The 'independence' triptych seems to offer us a glimpse of the poet in his 'natural' political element, as he marks an important moment in the life of the society in which he had always lived performed. Yet, I shall argue that these poems, produced at an event that revoked Manisi's (and all Transkeians') South African citizenship, represent a political and literary *cul de sac* into which, even if he had decided not to perform, Transkei's 'independence' had forced the poet. I shall consider the poems in terms of what they cannot say as much as in the light of what they try to exhort. Far from representing 'natural' circumstances for performance, I shall argue, the 'independence' scenario forces Manisi to the limits of his genre's capacity for expressing and reconciling his complex politics, and prevents him from speaking his truth.

As I have suggested, the category of the 'natural' has enjoyed long, if sometimes careless, use in studies of oral texts. This chapter begins by providing an overview of the ways in which the idea of a 'natural' context has been deployed by folklorists, anthropologists and oral literary scholars, and argues for the potential importance of the broad political milieu as a factor in determining the extent to which an artist can deploy her/his conventional licences, even in local, seemingly bounded event contexts. I argue that the praise poet's conventional authority and freedom of speech are compromised not only by censorship, but also, at a deeper level, by the distortion of the values and institutions he supports. The chapter accordingly moves on to review the historical decline in legitimacy and 'independence' suffered by the chieftaincy, rural politics, and, because of his association with both, the praise poet. I give special attention to the decline of the chieftaincy in the colonial encounter with the Xhosa because it is in colonial history that Manisi locates the source of Xhosa deprivation. I argue additionally that, although Manisi was a South African nationalist as well as a supporter of the ideal of chieftaincy and of Xhosa traditions and land claims, the increasingly binary nature of South African struggle politics insisted on an

absolute division between rural, 'tribal' allegiances and urban, black nationalism. The final part of the chapter examines one of Manisi's 1974 Fort Hare poems and, in detail, the poet's 1976 'independence' triptych. I shall argue that, in a context in which legitimate political identity and community were decided by the national politics, Manisi failed to find a democratic space in which to articulate his political ideals for South Africa. As a result, I shall suggest, his Transkei poetry was compromised by its context.

### **'Natural' contexts**

In an important review article, Charles L. Briggs and Richard Bauman (1990) trace the development of a range of ways of studying and valuing the contexts in which performances are generated. They define performance as "a frame that invites critical reflection on communicative processes. A given performance is tied to a number of speech events that precede and succeed it ...", and they argue that "[a]n adequate analysis of a single performance ... requires sensitive ethnographic study of how its form and meaning index a broad range of discourse types, some of which are not framed as performance" (1990: 60-61). This insight into how contextual discourses shape and are shaped by performance is of special significance in thinking about Manisi's struggle to command the meanings of the terms he uses in his poetry. Circulating discourses are both products and agents of the many macro factors that coerce and enable performance.

Bauman identifies the circumstances relevant to a text's generation as "bounded segments of the flow of behaviour and experience that constitute meaningful contexts of action, interpretation and evaluation" (1986: 3). He regards the study of context in the ethnography of performance as "providing the most concretely empirical framework for the comprehension of oral literature as social action by directing attention to the actual conduct of artistic verbal performance in social life" (1986: 3). Bauman's theory of meaning in verbal art as emergent, as produced by the interaction of text and context, avoids the idea that meaning is governed either by the artist or by the circumstances in which s/he performs. But the idea that contextual circumstances are objectively knowable and can provide an "empirical" guide to textual interpretation is perhaps problematic in that it suggests consensus about what

comprises relevant context. Alan Dundes defines context with similar certainty, as the “actual social situation” in which a text is used (1964).

Attempting to classify the elements of context for analytical application, Malinowski proposes that we distinguish “the context of cultural reality”, comprised of “the material equipment, the activities, interests, moral and aesthetic values with which the words are correlated”, from the situational or social contexts, constituted by “the purpose, aim and direction of the accompanying activities” (1935: 22; 214). This scientific approach to contextual classification and content, while perhaps useful, highlights the problem of analysing context in general: the parts, when set out in analysis, always add up to considerably less than the whole they are expected to explain and invoke. Bauman’s six categories of context – of meaning, of institution, of communicative system, of social base, of individual, and of situation – likewise provide a checklist for the analyst, but they also separate out from one another factors which in fact overlap and are mutually constitutive. Bauman and Briggs point out that our efforts to reconstruct a full context for any text can “become an infinite regress” (1990: 68). They also warn that the “false objectivity” of context description often obscures the fact that what is described is framed by the researcher’s perceptions and can obscure rather than illuminate how the audience and the performer understand their circumstances. Analysing the factors in which a text is embedded can also have the effect of “reifying ‘the context’”, thus implicitly preserving “the premise that meaning essentially springs from the context-free propositional content, which is then modified or clarified by ‘the context’” (1990: 68).

Although there is debate about what constitute the relevant elements of context, there is tacit agreement that the distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ performance contexts is readily apparent. It is this consensus about the character of particular, local aspects of context that impedes our understanding of how micro and macro circumstances interpenetrate in the shaping of a text’s context. Critics often use terms like ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ unreflectively. For example, in her account of an occasion on which she recorded a narrative performance in the home of a Cree storyteller, Regna Darnell remarks that, “the context of visiting anthropologist was not an entirely natural one in native terms” (1989: 321). Pat Mullen’s work on Ed Bell’s stories involved recording tales in circumstances described by Mullen as being “close to the natural context of the usual storytelling events” (1978: 133). In his explication of enactment-centred theory, Roger D. Abrahams distinguishes between

the ontological realms of the everyday, and the intensive event, by relying on concepts like “*pure performance* or *play-proper*, *pure festivity* or *ritual-proper*” (1977: 102 original emphasis). The quality of purity implies an enabling and authentic context.

Similar purity of text and context is suggested in Bauman’s description of “cultural performance” (1984: 27-28). Typically, such performances are scheduled, “restricted in setting, clearly bounded, and widely public, involving the most highly formalized performance forms and accomplished performers of the community. Because they are scheduled, public, and elaborate, these performances are especially attractive to ethnographers” (Bauman 1984: 28). Bauman’s reference to ideal ethnography conditions implies the authenticity of such contexts and their texts, that they are observable but not, or only minimally, contaminable by the researcher. Perhaps the best example of the kind of self-engaged cultural context described by Bauman and Abrahams is that in which ritual occurs. For all the critics cited above, notions of naturalness, authenticity, boundedness and purity in relation to context depend on local components: event, audience and performer. Intrusion on, or breach of, the ‘natural’ happens when a context is manufactured for an outsider, when an outsider participates in and helps to shape the context event, and when convention operates as display or is itself breached, as with the use of the translator in Darnell’s example.

I am not proposing that the idea of the ‘normal’ should, or even could, be disposed of, but rather that it needs to be used with great caution as a simplified ideal of context that may not account for actual performances that appear to unfold in ‘traditional’, ‘natural’ event contexts. Analyses of the ways in which performance traditions adapt to altered circumstances – such as those created by the researcher’s fieldwork presence, equipment and agenda – rely for comparison on concepts like the ‘traditional’, and often provide sensitive insight into how a performer and his new audience relate to and understand each other. For example, Mullen and Bauman use the idea of the ‘normal’ to track Bell’s adaptation of his storytelling agenda and style to accommodate large-scale, public folk festivals and university classes. In following such analysis through, however, researchers often imply that ‘traditional’, ‘natural’ contexts are in practice always ideal, bounded, and immune to the pressures of politics. Bauman argues that Bell’s impulse to embellish his stories for audiences who are unfamiliar with their conventional mechanics means that he

sacrifices the delicacy with which credibility was traditionally manipulated in the tall tale and telegraphs the lying aspect of the story through metanarration ... There is a generic transformation in process here, transforming the tall tale into a broader and more clearly exaggerated fiction than the classic traditional form. (1986: 103)

Scholars commonly interpret evidence of formal adaptation to new contexts in terms of sacrifice and loss, implying not only that 'untraditional' contexts are compromising and potentially destructive of tradition, but also that, in 'normal', 'traditional' contexts rules and circumstances are stable and work universally to enable the artist's expression according to convention.

Olabiya Yai falls into this trap in his discussion of the relationship between researcher and performer. In academic contexts of performance, Yai contends, the

terms of the critical exchange are unilaterally set by the critic. The poet is thus degraded from his status of creator to that of informant. He can only make such contributions as required by the initiative of the critic. This pattern of distorted communication whereby poets and critics are not on the same footing can hardly be described as dialogic. (1989: 59)

In Chapter Four, I respond to Yai's claims by arguing that, while research contexts are coercive, performers often assert greater authority and ingenuity in creating fieldwork texts than Yai allows for in his model of critical autocracy. I am interested in this chapter in what underlies and enables Yai's construction of the critical context as abnormal and abusive of the artist's creativity: the assumption that 'natural' contexts – in which the performer performs for his own community, of his own volition – are characterised by terms of exchange that always privilege the poet's free creativity. In non-academic, 'normal' contexts, Yai implies, communication between performer and audience is democratic, or "dialogic", and undistorted by the intrusion of outside agendas.

Steven Moyo's investigation into Ngoni traditions of poetry in eastern Zambia likewise assumes that critical work on oral texts tends to be dishonest and dictatorial. Echoing many other writers in relation to the traditions on which they work, he calls for "an approach whereby the criteria for judging works of art can be expected to be integrative of the Ngoni folk traditions" so that "our appreciation of the work can be founded on an honest and accurate presentation of the structure, style, form and

content" (1986: 127). Both Yai and Moyo issue important warnings, but they also implicitly construct 'traditional' contexts as sealed spaces in which artistic integrity is given support. To understand performance in terms of the ways in which text and context invest and frame each other, it is necessary to overcome the false assumption that local, 'natural' contexts always favour free communication according to convention, and that 'unnatural', research contexts uniformly limit and compromise the performer.

Every performance has a centre of gravity that is determined by implicit agreements between audience and performer about their mutual purpose and relationship. Whether the purpose of the gathering and its texts is essentially political, ritual, or for entertainment, and whether the gathering is public or private significantly influences these agreements. Our understanding of convention and context depends on our agreement about the character of the texts at work in our midst. The Catholic priest can preach politics in his homily. However, the agreed centre of gravity that draws the participant-gathering together, and in terms of which participants principally interpret a church service and its texts, is the shared belief that the priest's speech and actions invoke religious community ritually. An intruding agenda or set of agreements may eclipse the ostensible conventions in terms of which a particular context and its texts operate. When, for example, stringent security laws banned public gatherings in apartheid South Africa except at funerals, mourners frequently transformed the private, ritual space of burial into a political platform. What was crucial to the clearing of this space for political use and to the transformation of its conventions was the common sense of urgency and purpose among participants. Certainty in folklore studies about what qualifies as a 'natural' context arises out of the fact that the spaces in which many traditions of storytelling emerge and continue to be practised – in the home, in the café or tea shop, by the fireside – are more intimate and less susceptible to macro politics than is the overtly political and public forum in which praise poetry and like political genres customarily operate.

Details about event, audience composition and response, and the audio-visual effect of the performer are essential components of the analysis of how a praise poem works, or fails to work, in its political context of utterance. They are insufficient in themselves, however. What is needed is an approach to text and context that asks how the conventions governing the genre operate in their specific deployments. Such an approach allows for the flexibility and adaptability of convention but recognises when



the limits of convention have been exceeded and communication has failed. We must ask what the genre mandates, what the audience and performer agree at their particular meeting, and how the event and its broad political context shape and support, or undermine, conventions and agreements. To what extent, in other words, is the poet free to say what he wants to say to an audience that respects his authority and interprets his performance under the assumption that he is in good faith? It is the matter of the poet's freedom – to exercise authority, to deploy convention, to craft address and speak, to some extent, on his own terms – that is particularly complex because it depends not only on obvious factors, like the presence or absence of censorship, but on the general political milieu, which invests local contexts and conditions audience exegesis.

The central conventions governing praise poetry are the poet's licence to speak his mind and his mandate to reveal truth and to campaign for a just and balanced politics. Opland and Kaschula have described, with specific reference to security legislation enforced in Transkei, the disabling conditions of censorship in which praise poets operated during apartheid. They discuss the detention under Transkeian security laws of poets and chiefs who spoke against Mathanzima and Pretoria (Opland 1998: 280, Kaschula 2002: 134). Freedom of speech is central to the proper functioning of the imbongi's licence. However, the poet's freedom is not encapsulated in his political right to say the words he wishes to. The convention of poetic licence depends additionally on the poet's institutional 'independence', both in practice and in popular perception, and on whether it is possible to address the full range of questions, remedies and publics implicated in the 'truth' he identifies.

The operation of poetic licence depends, then, on how the poet understands his speaking conditions and on how his audience interprets his art using a wide range of frames of reference. As Bauman points out, "... context is more than simply a matter of situational setting, identified in objective terms. Far more important ... is the participants' sense of 'what it is that is going on here'" (1986: 105). In 1976, when Manisi performed at Transkei's 'independence', the political context of compromised chieftaincy undermined Manisi's conception and expression of justice, and retarded his application of the conventional freedoms of his form despite the local, so-called 'natural', context of his performance in which his political immunity was guaranteed by his chief's favour. The history of the compromised chieftaincy had its roots not in apartheid but as Manisi so acutely perceived, in the colonial encounter.

## **The history of colonial and apartheid chieftaincy in the making of 'independent' Transkei**

Transkei celebrated its 'independence' from South Africa four months after the Soweto uprising<sup>1</sup>, in the wake of which the armed struggle against apartheid significantly intensified. Rejected by most urban Africans as nothing more than a creature of apartheid, 'independent' Transkei was Pretoria's flagship homeland operation. Opland remembers the midnight ceremony at which South Africa's flag was lowered and replaced by Transkei's white, green and ochre banner as being an unimpressive occasion, "... a tinpot charade, really" at which "[t]he highest ranking visiting dignitary was a Paraguayan admiral" (2005: 136). In the international community, Transkei's sovereignty was recognised by South Africa, Taiwan and Israel only. Several iimbongi marked the midnight moment of transition but, although he was in Umtata, Manisi was not among them and had not come to bear witness to proceedings. On the following afternoon an inaugural ceremony was held in Transkei's capital to mark the installation of Transkei's first 'independent' Prime Minister and State President. Unexpectedly, Manisi arrived at the event and was immediately invited to replace Nelson Mabunu as the Official Praise Singer of the celebrations. In his autobiographical sketch, Manisi writes of his status at the occasion with unconcealed pride. Opland describes the way in which Manisi was favoured:

Mbutuma, Dontsa and Qangule [other Transkeian iimbongi] produced izibongo from the sidelines of the field in front of the banked rows of seats: they were prevented from mounting the steps leading to the dais and the microphone. Manisi, however, was granted free access. (2005: 136)

He also provides a vivid description of the spectacle of Manisi's declamations:

During his impressively dramatic performances Manisi stood fixed before the microphone, ranks of soldiers drawn up beneath him on the field, members of the press down to his right and a sea of multicoloured umbrellas ranged on either side of him. He raised his spears as his urgent

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<sup>1</sup> On the 16 June 1976, Soweto school children marched in protest against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in their schools. Police overreaction to the march sparked a year of protest action instigated by school pupils.

words rushed on and hurled one down quivering in the earth to incite the attendance of ancestral spirits. (2005: 136-137)

Manisi's poetry at the event was addressed to Transkeians and was expected to have force, to be comprehended, and to contribute to the ceremonial function of the celebrations. The performance-transcriptions, however, provide us with a contorted triptych of poems that suggest Manisi's unease on the occasion.

Transkei 'independence' represented the combined efforts of Pretoria's apartheid government and government-employed chiefs, the most important of which was Mathanzima. I have argued that Manisi's perhaps vague, but certainly passionate, political vision was one of a multiracial, democratic South Africa in which the chieftdom continued to operate at the local level according to historically established moral and political principles. Leaving aside the intractable question of how to marry national citizenship with regional subjecthood, it is possible to identify the central contradiction in Manisi's address of Transkeians on the occasion on which they forfeited their South African citizenship: the institution of chieftaincy, the ideal of which was authoritative in Manisi's exhortations of his subjects, had already been irreversibly corrupted by colonial and apartheid policy, and had itself colluded in its own corruption as well as in the further division of South African land and people. Transkei's 'independence' was the most vivid embodiment of these betrayals. Chiefs, then, had in part been responsible for removing from Manisi the possibilities of addressing Xhosa people as South Africans, and of exhorting listeners to work for his vision of racial harmony and national wholeness.

In the Introduction, I presented evidence that, in the days of Xhosa 'independence', before the devastation caused by defeat in the later frontier wars and by the 1856-1857 cattle killing, chiefs were regarded by their subjects both as possessing divine authority and as being answerable to popular will. This paradox of popular regard was what provided balance and accountability – a chief's authority was considerable, yet, if his rule was judged by his people as being cruel or unjust, he risked losing their support. Responsible chieftaincy functioned optimally when the social and moral order in which it operated was able to deflect or absorb the destructive ambitions of outsiders, and when the territory with which it was intimately associated was secure. Several customs and structures supported the legitimacy of the chieftaincy as an answerable institution. Jeff Peires explains that when chiefs behaved

treacherously or murderously in pre-colonial times, equilibrium was restored by the consequences of unjust actions – subjects might, for example, desert their chief and move to a neighbouring community (1981b: 164). Carter, Karis and Stultz refer in their study of Transkei to the “built-in fissiparous tendency” of the Xhosa chieftaincy (1967: 83): the institutions of the Great House and the Right Hand House allowed for potential splits and ‘independence’ such as the original division between the Gcalecka and Rharhabe houses of Phalo’s line.

Both Peires and Carter et al argue that the imposition of foreign bureaucracy and agendas (first colonial and then apartheid) on Xhosa society broke the integrity of the chieftainship and choked its mechanisms of justice and equilibrium. Peires argues that when colonials intervened in Xhosa disputes to protect their clients, “actions were not followed by their logical consequences” because Xhosa society was “[d]eprived of the means of disciplining its recalcitrants” (1981b: 164). The institution of the chieftaincy was compromised by its breached integrity both in practice and in the popular perception of its disempowered subjects. The split in the Rharhabe line in the early years of the nineteenth century, which I shall discuss in Chapter Four in relation to Manisi’s historical poem on the subject, was exploited and deepened by colonial overtures to Ngqika, one of the two chiefs involved in a rancorous series of domestic and political disputes. Ngqika sided with the British against his uncle, Ndlambe, and was able to call on colonial support to put down Ndlambe’s supporters after battles. However, Ngqika lost many of his supporters to his uncle because of his reputation as a collaborator. Perhaps even worse, he lost much of his best land after colonials had defeated Ndlambe’s forces in the Battle of Grahamstown in 1819 and no longer needed Ngqika. Colonial corruption of the chieftaincy was bound up with colonial usurpation of vast tracts of Xhosa land. So rapid and devastating was Xhosa dispossession that by the middle of the nineteenth century the Xhosa were ripe for the millenarian prophecies that precipitated the cattle killing of 1857.<sup>2</sup>

In his defence of the division of territory proposed by the apartheid government’s homeland scheme, in terms of which less than 10% of the land would belong to the majority of its inhabitants, the Minister of Finance, Dr Donges, proclaimed: “It is history that has drawn the boundaries, and not the government, for

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<sup>2</sup> The cattle killing is dealt with in Chapter Four in relation to Manisi’s narrative *izibongo* on the subject of the prophet, Nongqawuse, who promised the Xhosa that if they burnt their crops, laid waste to their stores of grain and destroyed their cattle, abundance, autonomy and land would be restored.

the Bantu Homelands are the area which Non-Whites originally occupied. Therefore, they have no moral claim to more land" (Quoted in Mbeki 1964: 16).<sup>3</sup> Although for Donges 'history' (by which he means the period since white settlement and before apartheid) provides an unimpeachable defence, for Manisi it is the culpable platform on which Pretoria continued to deny and freshly assault Xhosa claims to land and to a share in national power. Before British colonials had settled the Cape Colony, Xhosa speaking clans and chiefdoms had migrated to territory in the south east of southern Africa, only a small part of which would become Transkei. As late as 1840, Peires argues, the Xhosa proper were an expanding nation that commanded considerable fertile land: "In the shade of the House of Phalo every man had a ridge for his homestead and a stream for his cattle" (1981b: 161). A mere seven years later, however, by 1847, "things were very different. The Xhosa kingdom had shrunk, and in shrinking had lost vast tracts of its most fertile territory" (Peires 1981b: 162). As a result of their dispossession, and their attendant feeling of insecurity about the land they yet retained, the Xhosa were shaken as a people.

Although the joint struggle of some Xhosa-speaking chiefs and commoners against British colonials was a unifying factor<sup>4</sup>, schisms rapidly became entrenched. As the example of Ngqika illustrates, chiefs became known by their people either as resisters or as collaborators depending on their relationship with colonial bureaucrats. Among Xhosa commoners, attitudes towards missionary education and European culture differentiated people into 'School' or 'Red' communities. 'School' people wished to acquire British education and technology while 'Reds' clung fiercely to custom and tradition as a bulwark against colonial institutions and beliefs. Manisi's poetry evidences elements of both of these positions, and suggests the ambivalence of one who is committed to custom but yearns for the accomplishments of an imposed system. Peires argues that the foremost Xhosa 'school' intellectual, Soga, did more to subvert the "old way of life than the activities of any single Colonial Spy" by supporting the adoption of "the market and the plough" (1981b: 164). Colonial and apartheid economies depended on black labour, which was in plentiful supply following colonial land invasions and the decline of crops and cattle grazing on the overburdened land designated for African use. The related pressures of dispossession

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<sup>3</sup> The statement was made in a speech in Burgersdorp on 26 July 1962.

<sup>4</sup> Ndlambe united several Xhosa groups against Grahamstown colonials, but they were defeated. By the late 1840s, the Thembu had joined the Xhosa side against colonists.

and foreign authority and economy undid the possibility of a coherent, self-sufficient Xhosa identity and polity. According to Peires, through their struggle for land and new forms of employment, and their efforts to forge appropriate alliances with other southern African polities, the Xhosa increasingly became part of a wider South Africa (1981b: 164).

The authority of the chieftaincy was undermined not only by territorial dispossession but also by the imposition of colonial forms of government on Xhosa society. Sir Harry Smith, a ruthless colonial official who routinely humiliated chiefs by commanding them under threat of gunfire to kiss his feet, proclaimed in his first meeting with chiefs: "Your land shall be marked out and marks placed that you may all know it. It shall be divided into counties, towns and villages, bearing English names ..." (quoted in Peires 1981b: 166). Driven back by the mid 1840s to territory between the Keiskamma and Kei rivers, known then as British Kaffraria, the Xhosa were administered by successive British High Commissioners on behalf of Great Britain. Not yet British subjects, the Xhosa were nevertheless subjected to colonial exercise of arbitrary justice, severe floggings, and the despatching of their youths to seven years indentured labour in the Cape Colony. As Peires remarks, "[f]or the Xhosa, British Kaffraria was a monster which swallowed them up, tore them from their children, and squeezed them off their land into the labour market" (1981b: 169).

Chiefs lost not only their land and jurisdiction but also their position as mediators between Xhosa subjects and their ancestors. Chiefs' responsibility to ancestors was replaced by responsibility to colonial officials. Sir George Grey proposed that the way to undermine and destroy Xhosa laws and customs was to remove chiefs' rights to administer land allocation and seize judicial fees and fines and to provide them instead with a colonial stipend that would result in their dependence on "the Government of the country" (Grey, quoted in Peires 1989: 63). Under Grey's ruthless administration, and following the unparalleled devastation in Xhosa history of the 1857 cattle killing which left the Xhosa destitute and broken in spirit, British Kaffraria became a mixed territory populated by different African communities and by white settlers. Simultaneously, Peires notes, destitute Xhosa flocked to the Colony in search of employment (1989: 321). The consequence of this two-way movement of population was to ease the absorption of British Kaffraria into the Cape Colony. For Peires, the period of the mid-nineteenth century destroyed the viability of ethnicity as a resistance strategy on the eastern frontier (1989: 321). The

wide-scale movement of Xhosa to schools, dockyards and other places of colonial employment signified, according to Peires, their acceptance of the need “to work out a new destiny inside the belly of the colonial beast” (1989: 321).

Under British administration, defiant Xhosa chiefs were imprisoned on Robben Island where many died and were buried in dereliction of Xhosa custom. In Manisi’s poetry, the unlawful exile and burial of these chiefs represent historical loss as well as mandate for Xhosa claims to the restitution of their land and dead. In the region that would become Transkei, chiefs had little control over the resettlement patterns encouraged by colonial government – herded into inadequate territory, Thembu, Gcalecka and Mfengu groups contended one another’s claims, fuelling old hostilities. Although colonial administrations understood the necessity of using the chieftaincy to entrench division among African societies, their policy towards chiefs was inconsistent, and oscillated between breaking and bolstering their authority. When the chieftaincy appeared to rally, however, it was because it had been boosted by self-interested colonial powers rather than by chiefs’ autochthonous authority.

From 1877 to 1894, Transkei territories were formally annexed to the Cape colony and chiefs were excluded from direct participation in local government, over which formidable white magistrates held sway. In 1894, the introduction of the Bunga System divided Transkei into 26 magisterial districts, each represented by a combination of elected constituents and magistrate appointees. Magistrates chaired the district councils, and their overriding authority militated against any possibility of practical democracy. Properly known as the United Transkeian Territories General Council, the Bunga comprised the Chief Magistrate of Transkei, the 26 council magistrates and three members from each district. Paramount chiefs also sat on the council *ex officio*. The purpose of the Bunga was to discuss local matters. Magistrates reviewed the opinions expressed at meetings of the Bunga and submitted them to the Governor General for his information. Mandated to discuss rather than to decide, the Bunga had minimal power and was in all matters answerable to the colonial government.

In 1913 the government of the South African Union passed the Land Act, which set aside land for the exclusive habitation of black South Africans. Called Native Reserves, these inadequate territories located the majority of Africans away from white cities and towns, and served as landscapes of labour availability for the South African economy. After 1948, the apartheid government used native reserves as

readymade geographies of division for its homeland scheme, claiming, as Donges did in 1962, that they were the 'natural' homelands of black nations. Although in 1949 the Bunga had explicitly rejected the tenets of apartheid, in 1955 it voted to adopt the Bantu Authorities Act through which Pretoria abolished the Natives Representative Council, the only mechanism of black representation, albeit minimal and indirect, at the national level. The Bantu Authorities system was Pretoria's variation on colonial rule, and instituted a combination of direct and indirect rule. Conceived to regulate and divide rural Africans and to attach urban Africans artificially to rural domicile and command, Bantu Authorities comprised a rigidly hierarchical regime of government appointed chiefs who ruled on government terms. According to Mandela, "[t]he main idea was to restore power to traditional and mainly conservative ethnic leaders in order to perpetuate ethnic differences that were beginning to erode" (1994: 141).

Having perceived the threat posed by growing African nationalism, the Nationalist government sought to divide the South African population, already classified racially in terms of the 1950 Population Registration Act, into a single white nation and multiple black nations. The chieftaincy, controlled by Pretoria, was used to facilitate and provide 'legitimacy' to the division of Africans into distinct, language-based nations, a process represented by the government as restoring African 'independence'. Criticising Pretoria's disingenuous rhetoric, Mandela argues that the Nationalist government "pretended to preserve what they were attempting to destroy. Laws stripping people of their rights were inevitably described as laws restoring those rights" (1994: 141). Such was the duplicity that invested the terms and institutions governing rural authorities that those who tried to resist apartheid by appealing to the ideal of a truly independent chieftaincy found they had no legitimate space from which to make their claims either to Africans generally or, indeed, to the chiefs who fraudulently held power.

Summarising the implementation of the Bantu Authorities system in Transkei, Mbeki contends that "[t]he thesis of government policy is clear – Africans are still in the tribal stage, chiefs are the natural rulers, and the people neither want nor should have elected representatives" (1964: 41). In their respective discussions of Bantu Authorities, Mandela and Mbeki use terms like 'tribalism', 'ethnicity' and 'traditionalism' to express their sense of the artificiality and divisiveness of such constructs in their government authorisation. For African nationalists, the positive values once invested in chieftaincy could not be excavated from beneath the crushing



rumble of the corrupted rural authorities that now claimed legitimacy in traditional terms. For Mbeki, and for most urban Africans, chiefs,

like the Nationalists<sup>5</sup>, have a mortal fear of change and the will of the common peasants. Conservatism is the lifeblood of the chieftainship system ... Chiefs and government, therefore, have common aims: to resist movements advocating multiracialism and modern social development. (1964: 47)

Following the 1959 Promotion of Self-Government Act, which determined to give greater 'independence' to homelands, chiefs were explicitly instructed that their mandate was to maintain law and order, enforce government law and disperse unlawful assemblies (Mbeki 1964: 41). Even where they had real 'independence' in minor local matters, chiefs could operate only "inside the patterns imposed on them and unalterable by them" (Mbeki 1964: 42).

Mbeki concedes that Transkeian chiefs as much as Transkeian commoners "have consistently clamoured for more authority, but never at the expense of their claim to participation in the government of the whole country" (1964: 42). Political identity in Transkei continued to have local coordinates – homestead, clan, and chief – but inhabitants thought of themselves as South Africans as well as Xhosa or Sotho Transkeians, and Pretoria's efforts to enforce a totalising local identity on Africans did not receive popular support among the rural population. Nevertheless, Transkei's Territorial Authority, which was advised by a specially appointed Recess Committee in which Mathanzima was a leading light, requested formal 'independence' from South Africa. In 1963 Transkei became the first apartheid homeland to be granted self-government. Transkeians were not, as a result, made aliens in South Africa although their rights there were anyhow negligible. Among migrant workers, who supported families in Transkei but lived much of their lives in the slums and hostels outside cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg, anti-chief sentiment was perhaps even more vehement than it was among rural communities. Archie Mafeje's investigation of the attitudes of townspeople to chiefs focuses on a visit made by Chief Manzezulu Mtikrakra to his subjects in Cape Town in 1962. "Some migrants," Mafeje summarises, "feel that chieftainship is an anachronism" (1963: 88), and "[i]n

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<sup>5</sup> By 'Nationalists', Mbeki means the NP Government of South Africa.

general the urban population is opposed to chieftainship and regards chiefs as *oomantshingilane* (police-spies)" (1963: 89).

In the previous chapter, I discussed Manisi's support of Mtikrakra who was by lineage a legitimate chief but who had been restored to power by Pretoria, which rendered him vulnerable to accusations of corruption and complicity. The suspicion and hostility with which Mtikrakra was greeted in Cape Town by the subjects Pretoria had placed under him, evidences the extent to which Bantu Authorities had damaged the reputation of well-intentioned, hereditary chiefs as much as that of illegitimate chiefs. Mafeje records a poignant speech made by a Joyi chief who was present at Mtikrakra's reception in Cape Town. The Joyi speaker contends that it is treacherous of chiefs to claim traditional legitimacy and that difficult choices are required of rural leaders:

I am also a chief because my father was one of the chiefs of the Thembu. Traditionally, chiefs are not created, but are born. My father never betrayed his people, and therefore, I have no reason to betray them nor will I ever betray them. For that reason, I have chosen to be a worker amongst other workers, and I am satisfied in my dissatisfaction. (In Mafeje 1963: 91)

Mathanzima, by contrast, saw collaboration with Pretoria as the most potent means available to him to satisfy his hunger for power.

By birth, Mathanzima was a minor chief and was subordinate to his cousin, Sabatha, the Paramount Thembu chief. Pretoria granted Mathanzima several territories in addition to those to which he legitimately had claim and, in 1966, elevated him to the position of Paramount Chief of what had been the Emigrant Thembu. Sabatha's authority was not recognised by Pretoria because of his protests against the Bantu Authorities scheme. Mbeki understands Mathanzima as an empire-builder whose loyalty to, and unjust promotion by, Pretoria turned the Thembu "into the strongest antagonists of the [Bantu Authorities] scheme in the whole Transkei" (1964: 64). In 1958, Sabatha and three other exiled Thembu chiefs drafted a memorandum in which they expressed the disappointment of their one-time hope that Pretoria would, as they had promised, "restore the golden era of African chieftainship" when "the power of the paramount chief derived directly from the people and did not depend on an army or a police force" (quoted in Mbeki 1964: 62-

63). By contrast, Mathanzima's admonition of those who opposed the homeland scheme suggests his corrupted sense of authority: "It is wonderful when the government gives you your rights and you go against that policy. All the fruits of the land are enjoyed by those who obey the government" (quoted in Mbeki 1964: 63).

Writing shortly after Transkei received self-government in 1963, Mbeki assesses Mathanzima's character and politics. When Mathanzima was a minor chief, Mbeki contends,

[h]e might have been called an African patriot; he was certainly hostile to the whole machinery of White rule. Doubtless, in the beginning, he snatched at anything that seemed to transfer a greater share of government from white to black shoulders. Such men, once caught in the Nationalist contrivance, could not escape with safety; and, indeed, they involved themselves even deeper for what they could get out of it ... Many must know, in their hearts, that the self-government scheme has proved a swindle. But now they have a profitable share in keeping it going. (1964: 63)

It is to the memory of the early, patriotic Mathanzima that Manisi constantly appeals in his poetry. Under the later, power-hungry Mathanzima, Transkei's agriculture declined, its land became overburdened and denuded, 'bush courts' were presided over by chiefs who exercised arbitrary power and drew exorbitant salaries for themselves by draining the Transkeian budget and imposing swingeing taxes on Transkeians of age, including the landless and unemployed. It was to such leaders that Manisi appealed fruitlessly in his 'independence' izibongo for a return to just rule.

In the run-up to the 1976 election, Mathanzima's party, the Transkei National Independence Party (TNIP), denounced liberalism, calling for an all-black parliament and civil service, complete 'independence' from South Africa, and the return of land to Transkei that had been occupied by white colonials and retained by apartheid. The opposition led by Chief Victor Poto argued for a multiracial parliament and opposed complete 'independence', aspiring rather to greater involvement in South African politics. Mathanzima's efforts to regain the land he claimed were unrewarded when he accepted 'independence', although he stipulated that 'independence' would not prejudice his claims. In the end, the TNIP won a significant majority of the votes cast in the 1976 election, and appeared to have a clear mandate for accepting 'independence' on behalf of Transkeians. However, Roger J. Southall contends that

Transkeians were, in fact, either strongly opposed to or had been pressurised to accept 'independence' (1982: 4). According to Southall, the election results did not reflect popular will because much of the population was illiterate and had to cast their votes orally in a context in which Mathanzima's security forces wielded excessive powers of detention and arrest. In addition, Southall cites the coercive power of the chiefs in lower houses, the absence of an adequate opposition, and an overall low voter turnout. Although he finds Southall's arguments generally persuasive, Stultz is less concerned with the legitimacy of the 1976 election result than with the much more important question of what choice Transkeians actually faced in the election.

Like Mbeki in relation to self-government, Stultz contends that even if Transkeians wanted greater 'independence' "that would not necessarily mean that Transkeian blacks have renounced their previous claims to equal participation in a common South African society" (1979: 56). Stultz also makes the crucial observation that "in deciding on the issue of 'independence', the choice presented to Transkeians (to the extent that they had a choice) was not between Transkeian 'independence' and participation in a democratic and non-racial South Africa" (1979: 56). Rather, Transkeians were asked to choose between, on the one hand, a racist, brutal South Africa in which they had negligible rights and no access to political participation, and in which black resistance was brutally put down, and, on the other, although practically unlikely and compromised by Pretoria's support, the promise of a Transkei free from apartheid South Africa. In Stultz's view, the 1976 election results evidence these difficult choices, and it is possible that many of those who voted considered 'independence' an interim measure "without necessarily abandoning a longer term aspiration to share in the opportunities of a wholly 'liberated' subcontinent" (1979: 56). Manisi was one of those who continued to hope for equality in a future South African context, but his position was complicated by his equal support for a concept of chieftaincy that was as distant a reality as black participation in a democratic South African government. How was Manisi to command the contradictions in his position at an event that was denounced by African nationalists, that stripped Manisi of his South African citizenship, and that had been achieved by the demise of the ideal of chieftaincy he sought to promote?

### **'Independence' poetry**

There are many questions that can be asked about the poet's moral position in these coercive circumstances. Remembering Manisi's 'independence' performances, Opland feels compelled to ask: "what was he doing there, seeming to lend legitimacy to a political structure he had passionately opposed? Why travel to Umtata at all when he could easily have stayed away? ... had Manisi sold out and allowed himself to be used?" (2005: 143). Pursuing the question of moral choice, Opland, like Mbeki in 1964, compares the ways in which three related Thembu chiefs responded to apartheid: Sabatha had fruitlessly, and rather weakly, opposed Pretoria while trying to retain his hereditary status, and had been deposed and sent into exile; Mathanzima had complied wholeheartedly with government and was the beneficiary of 'independence'; and Mandela had disowned the politics of heredity to join, on equal terms with ordinary South Africans, the national resistance movement. Manisi produced poetry about all three of these men, as my previous chapters illustrate, and would have favoured the reconciliation of their positions so that local, traditional authority could be accommodated within the framework of the African national mission. Apartheid's abuse of local authorities, and the rejection of the chieftaincy by African nationalists meant that the accommodation Manisi sought was impossible. During apartheid South African politics was at its most polemical, and voices like Manisi's found little sympathy.

From the perspective of the resistance struggle, the 1970s in South Africa was the decade of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), whose principal intellectual was Steve Biko. The BCM asserted the need for black South Africans to regain their pride in their blackness in order to unite against the psychological and material tyranny imposed on them by apartheid. The 1970s is also associated in South African literary history with township, or Soweto, poetry, a militant, BC inspired form. The Soweto poets did not always reach the broad, popular audiences to which they appealed because their poetry was a literate, published form that cost its readers the price of a book – no insubstantial sum to black South Africans. Soweto poets were certainly widely read in intellectual circles, however, where they caused considerable excitement and controversy. Their eclectic poetry drew on Western as well as African forms, including oral praises (Chapman 1996: 334). Written in a remade, synthetic English and in an oral style that defied the rules of written literature, township poetry

expressed black, urban experiences of brutality, alienation, fear and fury, and urged its readers to reclaim their pride and mobilise against their oppressors.

Academic circles responded with what would become a protracted and frequently rehearsed debate. Many argued that the poetry's sloganeering and naked politicking excluded it from the realm of the literary in which texts ought to illuminate minds through subtler, more complex and imaginative creativity.<sup>6</sup> In addition, according to this side of the debate, Soweto poets constructed a 'people' by oversimplifying class and gender differences, and used symbols of African purity in unconvincingly close proximity to calls for political change along modern lines (Chapman 1996: 337). The other side of the debate argued that Soweto poets had claimed for their writing the authority and licence to craft new terms of expression. This was the kind of poetry that enjoyed moral and political legitimacy among African nationalists. Its position was clear and uncomplicated: it refused ethnic division and white autocracy. Although Soweto poets used an oral style and were influenced by the praise form, they worked to wrench these influences loose from their rural associations. Similarly, their use of their African rather than Christian names claimed an Africanity set free from distinctions like clan or chieftdom. African identity of this breadth provided a powerful construction of blackness that could stand up to government and rural appeals to tribal identity.

In the 1980s, as I discussed in the Introduction, Trade Union poets used the izibongo form to reject chiefs and to bolster urban institutions that would counter class and race oppression. Popular performance poets like Mzwakhe Mbuli also used elements of oral izibongo, as well as claiming the kinds of authority usually commanded by iimbongi – Mbuli, for example, became known as the People's Poet. The Preface to Mbuli's 1989 collection, *Before Dawn*, congratulates the poet on the honesty of his poetry, comparing it favourably with the discredited works of poet laureates "who pandered to the whims and moods of princes, presidents and nobility" (7). It is difficult to miss the implication of praise poets in this criticism. In his poem "Triple M", Mbuli attributes what he calls the "massacre of the land" to three homeland leaders: Mathanzima, Mangope and Mphephu<sup>7</sup> (15-16). In 'Why Tricks Not Solutions', he explicitly claims to be the voice of truth:

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<sup>6</sup> The arguments are advanced in de Kok and Press (eds) 1990, and Ndebele 1991.

<sup>7</sup> They were the rulers of the first three independent homelands: after Mathanzima's Transkei gained 'independence' in 1976, Lucas Mangope's Bophuthatswana was declared independent in 1977, and

I cannot betray the mission of my existence,  
 The mission of truth telling,  
 My poetry is the truth,  
 I and the truth are one. (1989: 85)

Trade Union and urban, performance poets show in their adaptation of the izibongo form that poetic claims to 'truth' and legitimacy depend on the poet's uncompromised participation in black-nationalist politics, and rejection of all apartheid strategies like homeland 'independence'.

In Manisi's poetry, contradictions abound: demands for the restoration of Xhosa land to the Xhosa nation wrestle with exhortations to black and white South Africans to share the nation's wealth and land equally. As many commentators have remarked of other forms of praise poetry, an izibongo is typically an assemblage of opposites. Opland contends that the interpretation of a Xhosa praise poem "may proceed from an appreciation of the structure of association and contrast" (1998: 111). The poet "establishes binary oppositions in order to demonstrate how they may be bridged" (Opland 1998: 113) and his conventional authority aids him in drawing "his audiences into the forbidding complexities of his poem in order to return them to society improved and enlightened" (1998: 135). Although complexity is a definitive feature of accomplished izibongo, the praise poet, who is mandated to restore equilibrium where imbalance exists, is expected to command the contradictions he highlights. These contradictions should illuminate rather than further obscure, and their resolution, which may take several forms such as exhortation or censure, should be comprehensible to the audience.

The idea of the imbongi as a central figure, able to provide his audience with analysis and solution, depends, especially at critical transitional moments, on the poet's command of his context. In Manisi's poetry at Transkei's 'independence' celebrations in Umtata in 1976, the poet enjoys the authority invested in him by Mathanzima's pleasure at his presence and by the applause of an attentive local audience. However, the poems evidence the poet's struggle with broader, political contexts. The contradictions they set up are inadequately resolved, and their expressions of the mysteries that surround Mathanzima obscure rather than illuminate.

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Venda, led by Patrick Mphahlele, was made independent in 1979. Of the other homelands, only Ciskei advanced beyond the stage of self-rule and was granted 'independence' in 1981.

These poems, produced in a 'natural' event context before a familiar audience, are uneasy poems; they are not the self-assured, authoritative products of a poet in charge of his sense of how the world ought to be. This is because, on the occasion of 'independence', the country of Manisi's imagination officially faded from view.

The first of Manisi's poems at Transkei's 'independence' celebrations begins by hailing his local chief, Manzezulu Mtikrakra, the man who fourteen years earlier had been so negatively received by his Cape Town constituents. Manisi greets Manzezulu energetically, and rehearses his credentials as chief and guardian of important districts. However, the poet stresses the destitution of the people over whom Manzezulu rules and attributes this poverty to the violence and dispossession inflicted on Transkei's people first by colonials and then by Afrikaners:

Hail, Manzezulu!  
 There then's this chief  
 of Mthikrakra's Xhiba House;  
 there then's Manzezulu,  
 the chief beneath Lukhanji;  
 so tall he must stoop, gaunt though he's eaten,  
 grasshopper, python hunter,  
 guardian of outstanding mountains,  
 of Zingxondo and Lukhanji,  
 notable mountains in Glen Grey,  
 with the striding gait of a secretary bird.  
 He's a gangly tree with no branches,  
 for he rules over destitute people:  
 from day to day they're the victims of roughnecks.  
 Oh how they're roughed up by roughnecks!  
 Oh how they're ground beneath English heels!  
 Now even the coloureds despise us:  
 we stumble about from day to day.  
 When King Mhlobo's son<sup>8</sup> laid claim to the land  
 the Boers treated us boorishly:  
 we laid claim to Nonesi,  
 claiming Komani's town,<sup>9</sup>  
 since the roots of our nation were planted there  
 in days long past,  
 for Ndaba's stores were kept there,  
 since Mthikrakra lived there  
 with his mother Nonesi. (137)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mhlobo was Mathanzima's father.

<sup>9</sup> Nonesi's Nek, named after the Thembu chieftainess Nonesi, is a ridge between Glen Grey and Queenstown. Komani's town had been owned by the Zima clan before the arrival of colonials.

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for poems and extracts from poems refer to their location in Opland 2005.



Komani's town is the Xhosa name for Queenstown, a white enclave that had once been Xhosa territory. Queenstown was one of the territories Mathanzima had demanded the government return to Transkei, but there was no indication by the time of 'independence' that Komani would once more belong to the Xhosa.

The focus in Manisi's opening poem is on historical dispossession. Against this vision of deprivation, Manisi conjures an address of his Transkeian audience that at first appears to signal his delight in 'independence' as a solution to the injustices of the past:

So then, tribes of Transkei,  
 so then, throngs of my countrymen,  
 allow me, men, to say just one thing:  
 I say Transkei the great has come into its own,  
 Transkei the great has entered,  
 to the confusion of the racists,  
 to the confusion of the militants,  
 to the confusion too of the thugs,  
 who came bearing God before them,  
 but when they came they reversed their collar  
 and slapped a musket under their arms:  
 the whip devoured the blacks.  
 We responded with kirrie and assegai  
 but oh, it was all in vain:  
 these men fought from behind the mountains,  
 they thrashed us with their cannon  
 avoiding hand to hand combat.  
 But even so Mhlobo's boy  
 has brought our land back to us:  
 he claimed and retrieved it,  
 now this boy's restored it.  
 When we say he's restored it  
 we mean Transkei the great, the land of our fathers  
 which was coveted by graspers  
 who came with deceit,  
 exploiting the Immanent Son of the Maker.  
 And so our power was sapped,  
 because they spoke of God  
 who was really revered at this homestead of Phalo,  
 yet this preaching was such a calamity  
 . . .  
 I disappear! (137-138)

The history provided earlier in this chapter suggests that the "racists", "militants" and "thugs" of whom Manisi anticipates surprise and dismay, had in fact 'created'

Transkei in the form it officially assumed at its 'independence', a moment Manisi tries to represent as a victory for Transkeians. A line from the end of the performance is missing from the transcription — Manisi had turned away from the microphone and his words were lost to the tape recorder — but it seems unlikely that it could have resolved the problem of the last section of the poem which seems unable to emerge from the confusion it expresses. Transkei is lauded as the result of Mathanzima's successful efforts to regain the land that so preoccupies Manisi's career agenda. English and Boer appear to have been beaten by Mathanzima's retrieval of Transkei, yet we know that Transkei represents only a small part of the land Manisi consistently laid claim to on behalf of the Xhosa, and that Mathanzima had been unsuccessful in securing most of his demands. The poem does not end with evidence of retrieval, but instead circles back upon its earlier concern with Xhosa exploitation. The image with which the audience is left by the poem is one of their historical powerlessness.

In the second of his 'independence' poems, Manisi identifies Mathanzima through enigmatic images and refers to his education as yet another baffling aspect of the chief:

Hail, Maker of Majesty!  
 That's rich, crowds of Ndaba.  
 It's news of an animal!  
 When we say so we speak of the panga  
 of the daughter of Phalo's place,  
 the panga with fearsome eyes,  
 the panga who's seized no-one's goods.  
 He's Lively, tense on his legs like a bird,  
 when it squats they say it sits,  
 when it rises they say "There he goes."  
 "I am your creature, Greed,  
 so I swallowed the tidbit with ashes,  
 yet I cannot roast for myself:  
 I'm the acknowledged tower of Thatho's place."  
 So I speak of you, Maker of Majesty,  
 leopard hunter who disturbed a python,  
 otter snatcher with tortoise as bait,  
 who studied and studied till he burped it all up.  
 He's the stars who conflict with the sun,  
 they usually consort with the moon:  
 they fear the sun because of the heat.  
 I believe he's the powerful land,  
 despite its power the sky has crushed it:  
 it brought drought and rivers dried up.  
 Yet everyone lies, but especially poets:

the stones dry out but leave pools behind.  
 He's a learned tome among whites,  
 which baffled wise men and experts.  
 From Qamata<sup>11</sup> he crept from bush to bush  
 and suddenly popped up  
 in Rharhabe's dustlands beyond the Keiskamma,  
 he entered the Tyhume and paddled about;  
 he left Alice for home with badges of learning,  
 he left and whizzed off,  
 came to Umtata Falls;  
 that's where he picked up the law.  
 He took up his sticks to go visiting.  
 When he reached Table Mountain  
 the waves billowed and tossed foam,  
 the Boers began to fart at each other;  
 Malan<sup>12</sup> ran to hide in Stellenbosch,  
 other thugs ran helter skelter,  
 and were turned back by the Drakensberg.

Though we say so, men,  
 here then's this tower of Mhlobo,  
 fair from afar like the Pleiades.  
 I've not seen a chief as fair as a female!  
 Son of Mhlobo, why wear a tie?  
 You were fair from the day of your birth.  
 Oh Nogate's a woman who bears fine offspring,  
 she doesn't give birth to dwarves,  
 she bears a long reed of a man  
 which looms over Mngqanga mountain,  
 rises head and shoulders over Lukhanji,  
 so they cringe in its shadow:  
 there's a lakeful of stars in his head,  
 he glitters like sun and stars.  
 But we've nothing more to say,  
 for he's our dark one much maligned:  
 in the dust all sheep look the same,  
 those who know them distinguish their markings;  
 all blankets look alike,  
 yet the width of their stripes is distinct;  
 the diviner resembles the witch,  
 but their spirit sets them apart.  
 I disappear! (138-140)

Manisi recites his chief's travels as a way both of marking Xhosa jurisdiction and of identifying the locations in which clashes between apartheid officials and Xhosa leaders have taken place. The poem also plots Mathanzima's education and legal

<sup>11</sup> Qamata was Mathanzima's Great Place.

<sup>12</sup> D. F. Malan served in Hertzog's cabinet between 1924 and 1933.

training onto the geography it charts, and illustrates the poet's concern with both the advantages and perils attached to Western offerings: he applauds Mathanzima for baffling whites by playing them so well at their own intellectual games but he also criticises his chief for having "studied and studied till he burped it all up". Mathanzima's excessive pursuit of education and white custom are once again implicitly castigated by the poet's disapproving inquiry into the reasons why his chief wears a tie rather than traditional Xhosa wear to a Xhosa ceremony. These excesses of education and Western style have, the poem argues in its final moments, weakened Mathanzima and stunted his growth as a leader of his people. Manisi's purpose in the poem is to remind Mathanzima of his primary obligations: not to his own advancement but to his people and his inherited duties. At this poem's conclusion, Manisi shifts from a description of his chief's appearance to a description of the height and beauty left to him as a legacy by his mother, Nogate. His physical inheritance is meant to be an outward show of his capacity to protect his land and people, and serves as a reminder that the chief has a duty to respect his destiny – owed doubly, to his ancestors, who gave him his power and beauty, and to his constituency to which he ought to be responsible.

The unresolved ambiguities surrounding Mathanzima's character and loyalties expressed in the second 'independence' performance place a question mark over Mathanzima's fidelity to his proper obligations. He is represented as being greedy and self-directed, as well as powerful and determined. The poet recognises that Mathanzima belongs to the Transkei community, despite the fact that he is "much maligned". But the poem concludes by reciting enigmatic axioms that delay judgement of the poem's subject by suggesting that his accomplishments must be decided by those in the know. In fact, while Manisi hails Mathanzima in this performance, he concerns himself very little with the immediate context. The difficulty of representing Mathanzima detains him, and he is forced to alert the audience to his dishonesty.

Manisi's final performance of the occasion begins by introducing Transkei's new President, Sigcawu, as he arrived at the stadium and made his way to the dais. The poet also addresses Mathanzima, and advises both leaders. But Manisi's principle focus is Transkei itself, and it is this poem that most clearly collapses beneath the irresolvable contradictions it expresses:

Hail, Watch the Country!  
 Hail, Watch the Country!  
 Watch the Country, Sigcawu's grandson,  
 son of Mqikela, of Faku, of Ngqungqushe,  
 of Thahle, of Ndayeni, of Ziqelekazi.<sup>13</sup>  
 His foot thuds like an elephant's in walking,  
 his head's as round as an ostrich egg,  
 his belly's swollen from Faku's<sup>14</sup> sorghum,  
 hefty-thighed from samp and pap.

And so, my fellow Transkeians,  
 the ranking royal son's arrived,  
 Transkei the great has entered:  
 there then's the President we have in Transkei.  
 Please greet him, ladies and men of our land,  
 all of you say, "Hail, Watch the Country!"  
 He's the great and pre-eminent royal descendant,  
 assured, with power to gather the nation,  
 ruler of numberless people, uncountable:  
 They stretch from the Mzimkulu  
 to the Maxhama mountains,  
 they're stopped by the sea,  
 they're stopped by the Drakensberg.  
 So then, descendant of Faku,  
 guard of a ridiculed nation,  
 there are our country's tramps,  
 there's the ridiculed family.  
 I see lovely men and women:  
 it's a pity their skin is chapped,  
 their lips all cracked,  
 starved of cream and butter.  
 We rely on you to embrace them:  
 a chief is a chief by virtue of people.  
 Preside over sweetness and order,  
 preside over forethought and ease,  
 so the fools and the flabbies,  
 the dummies and dumbbells,  
 the slugs and the sluggards  
 fall under your care and protection.  
 Rule by means of ironwood,  
 a black stick drawn from its forest refuge.  
 Keep God at your head,  
 for there lies the seat of wisdom.  
 Talk to the Immanent Maker,  
 to brace you for a ridiculed people,  
 for oh this land over which you'll rule  
 is a land in calamity's shadow,

<sup>13</sup> Sigcawu and his ancestors were members of the Mpondo.

<sup>14</sup> Faku was the paramount chief of the Mpondo in the first half of the nineteenth century.

as it shrugs off one form of oppression  
 another grumbles and covets it.  
 Once we lived with the English,  
 who grabbed and sold us to Boers;  
 today the Boers release our bonds.  
 One thing we know: there's a jackal here,  
 sitting like a shivering chicken.  
 It's you who will lend them dignity,  
 it's you who will see them safe.  
 May you talk to the God of our nation,  
 so that these wretched creatures,  
 these wan and indigent people,  
 may live with Qamata<sup>15</sup> because of you.

So then, we thank you,  
 panga of the daughter of Phalo's place,  
 we thank you, Mathanzima's heir,  
 for digging up our heritage for us,  
 so now we have our President  
 to rule over Transkei,  
 so that all those fools  
 who thought the ship would sink  
 may see it soar above nations.

So then, Mathanzima's child,  
 you digger of honey from a sheer cliff face  
 while others feared the stings,  
 panga of the daughter of Phalo's place,  
 fair from afar like the Pleiades,  
 you smashed the pointed spear we gave you,  
 you smashed the throwing spear we gave you,  
 you smashed the stabbing spear we gave you,  
 but you worked on the learning we gave you,  
 may you keep Watch the Country safe,  
 he's your compatriot, he's of our nation,  
 you're children of royal blood by birth,  
 may you lick each others' wounds,  
 leave the muddle-headed to grope  
 while you go off on your own way  
 (but the feeble-minded's protected at home).  
 Stay the heavy hand:  
 a heavy hand scatters homesteads.  
 How lean are the cattle thrashed without mercy,  
 lacking a driver who knows what he's doing.  
 May you both march in step with the Transkeian nation  
 and may Qamata bless you both.  
 I disappear! I disappear!! (140-143)

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<sup>15</sup> As well as being the name of Mathanzima's Great Place, 'Qamata' was the Xhosa name for God.

The elegiac quality of the poem sets it apart from the other two performances of the day, and its density and length suggest Manisi's intensity of feeling. The conflicting energies with which the poem is infused suggest acutely the poet's painful dilemma: is he to praise Transkei or to condemn it, place of his own birth, as one of apartheid's deceptive chimeras? Marked by extraordinary reversals as well as by a moving, emotive conclusion, it is a performance that tries unsuccessfully both to bless and to condemn its subject. Addressing his audience as "fellow Transkeians", Manisi appears to accept the political transformation accomplished by the context of his performance. But the grand geography he charts is contradicted by descriptions of the impoverishment, ill-health and starvation that in reality fill out the borders of that landscape.

Sigcawu's portly figure appears to be the subject of Manisi's praise, but when the poet stresses the emaciation of Transkei's starving inhabitants, the image of their swollen President becomes grotesque. Attempting to remedy Sigcawu's self-concern, the poem exhorts him to remember his chiefly obligations, but then immediately asserts his powerlessness in a land of calamity. Xhosa entitlement to Transkei is freshly asserted and 'independence' is legitimised accordingly. However, the images of Transkei as poverty-stricken and ridiculed are so many that they overshadow the poet's victorious contentions. The central insight of the performance in fact undermines Transkei's 'independence' altogether:

... oh this land over which you'll rule  
 is a land in calamity's shadow,  
 as it shrugs off one form of oppression  
 another grumbles and covets it.  
 Once we lived with the English,  
 who grabbed and sold us to Boers;  
 today the Boers release our bonds.  
 One thing we know: there's a jackal here,  
 sitting like a shivering chicken.

Manisi represents 'independence' not as release but as renewed bondage, perhaps as temporary reprieve designed to accommodate the generation of fresh plots against Transkeians.

The final section of the poem again presents contradiction by expressing the pain of a hope that is disproved by the poet's certainty that 'independence' brings a new oppression. Uttered as assertion, Manisi's representation of Transkei as the ship that will soar where many believed it would sink, is in fact nothing other than desire. His hope that Mathanzima and Sigcawu will bring dignity to their people seems inadequate to the hovering idea that freedom has not really come with 'independence'. The final section metes out advice to both rulers, encouraging them to care for each other and for their people, and to be merciful with their power. Rather than the emphatic assertiveness with which praise poems usually end, the final words sound like a prayer for a place and its people, or perhaps an elegy, hoping for what might have been. It is Manisi's poetic farewell to Umtata.

In appearing at Transkei's 'independence' celebrations, there is little doubt that Manisi wished to bolster his countrymen and to assert the responsibilities of proper chieftaincy to which he felt Sigcawu and Mathanzima were obliged despite their new secular titles. But in addition, the poems give expression to what lies beneath the facade of 'independence': they address their audiences as Transkeians but they also reveal their audience's civic and material impoverishment and the emptiness of their new national identity. While Mathanzima is praised as the new prime minister, he is also shown up as having failed in his chiefly capacity, and Sigcawu, while he is encouraged to behave according to the principles upon which chieftaincy turns, is set in an infiltrated landscape in which he is powerless. Manisi wants Transkei to succeed on the one hand, but on the other, he believes it cannot. The beauty of the chiefs he describes conceals the ugliness of their people's deprivation, and signals their complicity in Transkei's suffering. There is no resolution offered except Manisi's plea, his prayer, to his chiefs to recall their proper duties. That he pleads rather than exhorts or directly criticises suggests Manisi's sense of his powerlessness.

In his 'independence' poems, Manisi performed with immunity to arrest or censorship – Mathanzima had invited him to take the dais and the microphone. Yet, he does not evidence a feeling of power and of possession of his context. This is because official recognition of poetic authority is only one side of the poet's licence to speak truth. Another side of that licence is the poet's sense that he represents a community whose opinions have force. In these poems, Manisi envisions his audience and the wider political community for which it stands as being powerless in their



poverty and indignity; instead of appealing to his chief with their authority as backing, he can only plead on their behalf. The poet cannot speak for balance when none can be hoped for, when the polity is weakened by the power of its own leaders and by the despair of its constituents. Although Manisi's audiences were familiar to him and although they understood his words, they did not people a context that can be described usefully as 'natural'. He was not free to communicate his truth: cut off from one half of his political vision and its audiences – a wider South Africa – Manisi's address is inevitably stunted and unable to propose real solutions or reconcile the contradictions he expresses.

Whereas Mathanzima had repeatedly represented Transkeian 'independence' as a moment of decolonisation, the third poem Manisi performed at 'independence' does not return victoriously to his primary theme of the colonial encounter and pronounce its effects reversed. The poet cannot see truth in his chief's contention. The triptych as a set shows us the limits of what the praise form offered Manisi's worldview in the binaried context of apartheid. Whereas Manisi's poetry had always asserted the full range of identities to which the poet laid claim, on the occasion of Transkei's 'independence', he was forced to choose one identity over another. That he felt compelled to support Transkei's 'independence' even as he undermined it by stressing its entrapment in apartheid's web, suggests that he too was caught in a set of incongruous beliefs and in the very terms in which he spoke. He was not a revolutionary, and the chief-centred praise poem is not a revolutionary form. He had been a migrant worker, but he could not be a worker poet, denouncing the chieftaincy. Nor could he write a literature like Soweto poetry, and claim its single-minded ambitions and urban authorities. He was a man who believed that justice depended on the reestablishment of proper order, rather than the eradication of institutions that had been sullied. But the South African context seemed increasingly, in the 1970s, to diminish the prospect of compromise. Transkei was not a place of stability and balance, and Manisi understood, even if he sometimes balked at the idea, that restitution and equilibrium could only be achieved in the fuller national context.

**PART TWO**

## Chapter Four

### Fieldwork Contexts and their 'Unnatural' Texts

The majority of Manisi's recorded oral poems were produced in academic contexts manufactured to solicit and capture the poet's improvisations. Audiences for these occasions framed the poetry in terms of their varying composition and ability to comprehend Manisi's address. The micro-contexts of the poet's university performances were shaped additionally by his shifting institutional identities – for example, from fieldwork subject, to festival participant, to university employee. Each of these incarnations affected the authority with which the poet addressed his audiences, although often paradoxically by investing his poetry with a bitterly ironic awareness of the deception of official identities: Manisi did not often lay claim in his poems to his occasional academic title, preferring rather to shame his audiences by identifying himself as one among Africa's unjustly dispossessed black masses.

Opland arranged most of Manisi's academic opportunities, and participated in the immediate conditions in which the poet produced much of his university corpus. Their collaborative relationship shaped the conventions governing their presentations, but was often a contentious framing issue in itself, contrarily interpreted by their American audiences to reflect the polarised politics of black exile in the United States. Whether hostile or congenial, Manisi's academic encounters yielded a body of recorded poetry that, indelibly marked by invention and compromise in the act of its performance, was mediated again by Opland and Manisi in their agreed translations. The tape-recorded and textual residue of his relationship with Manisi, as well as his memory of his encounter with the poet, has subsequently framed Opland's many discussions and re-presentations of Manisi's translated poems, most recently and fully in *The Dassie* (2005). The corpus jointly produced by poet and scholar is marked by the length, experimentalism and inescapably political character of their nearly three-decade-long exchange.

The institutional inequality that characterised Manisi's relationship with his academic audiences was a principal subject of his poetry's criticism and exhortation. In the second section of this thesis, I argue that Manisi did not merely demonstrate his art for academics, but instead tried to engage them on political matters and in the terms provided by his genre. To understand and evaluate the highly mediated, unorthodox texts that resulted, I shall investigate how Manisi's local contexts of

poetic production and mediation interacted with the apartheid paradigm, in terms of which rural poets were often misunderstood and undervalued. The initial encounter in Manisi's poetry between recording imperatives and national politics, and between the poet's and the academic's agendas, occurred in the course of Opland's fieldwork expeditions to Transkei. It is with Manisi's earliest recorded poems produced in ethnographic conditions that this chapter is concerned.

Opland carried out fieldwork in Transkei and Ciskei in 1970, 1971 and 1972. In that period he accumulated from Manisi two *izibongo* on the subject of Mathanzima and four narrative praise poems, three of which focused on nineteenth century internecine Xhosa conflicts. Manisi produced the narrative poems in response to Opland's interest in establishing whether oral narrative *izibongo* exist in the Xhosa tradition. In this chapter, I shall deal comparatively with the two Mathanzima poems, and consider Manisi's strategy in representing Xhosa histories in his narrative *izibongo* with specific reference to "Nongqawuse", performed in 1970, and "Amalinde", recorded in 1971. My interpretation of Manisi's fieldwork performances focuses on the recorded texts they produced as sites of negotiation over agenda and authority in which the poet adjusts his address to the demands of new audiences and to the creation of permanent, recorded utterances that, he hoped, would be attributed by future audiences to his voice. Participants in these fieldwork events were not confined in the poet's imagination to the micro context, but instead always represented the larger political arena of exchange and intercultural interpretation. Textual production and mediation cannot usefully be discussed, then, in the insulated terms of immediate, material context. What is needed is a way of reading Manisi's academic performances that takes account of the opportunity and constraints the poet found in Opland's academic interest and project, and that is sensitive to the poet's understanding of how he should represent Xhosa communities, subjects and histories to a wider South African public and to an academic audience.

### **Fieldwork as encounter**

Opland's early encounters with Manisi resemble the fieldwork practice of many ethnographers, anthropologists and literary collectors who solicit material and information from informants for recording and subsequent analysis. According to Goldstein, whose categories of context influenced Opland's, there are two kinds of

collecting method that correspond to two broad types of context. The first of these collecting styles is the observation method in terms of which the fieldworker obtains data by “looking from the outside in” and recording what s/he finds without soliciting material or intervening in any way other than being present to the event (1964: 77). This method is appropriate to what Goldstein terms “the natural context”, which is also the “social context in which folklore actually functions in society” (1964: 80). The second method of collecting is the interview style, according to which the fieldworker questions the informant and asks for the data s/he hopes to collect. This method implies for Goldstein an artificial context “in which folklore is performed to order at the instigation of the collector” (1964: 82). It is the less desirable but often necessary method.

Goldstein explains that the fieldworker can be more or less involved in ‘natural’ folklore proceedings as a participant or fringe observer and that s/he can induce a ‘natural’ context that replicates the circumstances in which a performer would normally perform. Goldstein’s manual-like approach to manufacturing ‘natural’ context, suggests his interest in producing a decontextualisable, portable text that yields meaning and use value in proportion to the fieldworker’s skills as a solicitor. His discussion fails to consider both the play of authority and agenda at work in the soliciting context and how such shifts shape the textuality and meanings of the collected text. The ‘artificial’ context is not merely, as Goldstein’s description implies it is, a blank screen upon which fieldworker and informant project their object. At Opland and Manisi’s meetings, the screen was already animated with the multi-dimensional projections of the histories and identities each represented to the other and to himself.

In stressing the political texture of these recording sessions it is not my intention to diminish the significance of their material conditions of possibility, but rather to suggest that politics and the tape recorder cannot be dealt with as separable subjects of consideration – particularly when it is remembered that Opland’s rights to do fieldwork in Transkei and to form working relationships with black South Africans were themselves governed by apartheid rules<sup>1</sup>. In his advice to fieldworkers, Goldstein proposes cautious handling of “ethnographic dynamite” (1964: 116), a term he uses to name issues that go the heart of a society’s deeply held beliefs and defining

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<sup>1</sup> Opland had to cut short his first fieldwork expedition because security police were not satisfied the documents allowing him to travel in Transkei were in order.

practices. Such subject matter is often jealously guarded from the scrutiny of outsiders so that to breach the limits of what is freely given imperils the research project unless sufficient trust has been established over a committed period. Manisi was a keeper of lore who knew Xhosa histories and understood intimately the ritual and social practices of the community in which he had been nurtured, but it was never possible for Opland to approach the poet in the capacity simply of cautious enquirer into these integral secrets.

Opland always wore the skin and spoke the language of Manisi's other estranged countrymen who benefited from apartheid and whose colonial forebears the poet held responsible for the initial dispossessions and national disintegrations suffered by the Xhosa. Nevertheless, Opland and Manisi sought, though could never materially achieve, a relationship of equality through the collaborative work of mediating Xhosa poetry to audiences, both in performance and on the page. The efforts of each man to show friendship and respect for the other should not be devalued in considering the inevitable textual distortions wrought by the layers of mediation that produced Manisi's recorded poems. The existence of Manisi's academic corpus is owed in large measure to the reciprocity of exchange poet and scholar worked to secure *despite* the obstacles ranged against their mutual endeavour.

The distortions produced by textual mediation depend on the technologies of recording that are used, and on the frames imposed on recordings in the act of recording and subsequently in the acts of transcription, translation and interpretation. Before the advent of the tape recorder, the method of transcription in performance affected the shape of the text in its utterance. Bleek and Lloyd, for example, compiled their collection of Bushmen narratives and songs by copying down their informants' words as they spoke. It is impossible to discover what truncations or attenuations of narrative the suppressed pace produced. A similar scenario was backdrop to Devereux's collection of Mohave texts. The researcher's subjects slowed their usually rapid and staccato style of delivery to dictation pace to accommodate their scribe. Bauman questions the ontology of these texts in words that echo Opland's categorisation of Manisi's academic performances: "Were these latter renditions [the Mohave texts recorded by Devereux] performances? Certainly not by full Mohave standards" (1984: 20).

But there are often additional and complex components of context that affect the researched performance and its print trace. Bleek, for instance, had negotiated the

release into his care of several Bushmen who had been imprisoned under colonial judgement. He wished to gather their folklore into print and document their language. Although these Bushmen remained in positions of subservience as servants to the Lloyd family, kept from the land for which they unendingly yearned, they came to understand their own stories and songs as instruments of partial freedom and negotiation with colonials. They too had an agenda: according to Bleek and Lloyd, one gifted storyteller called //Kabbo “much enjoyed the thought that the Bushmen stories would become known by means of books” (1911: x). Lewis-Williams agrees that Bushmen storytellers “knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were the last repositories of those kukummi, and they did not want the stories to die with those into whose ears they had for so long floated” (2000: 26). By the latter half of the eighteenth century, the ‘normal’ context of Bushmen storytelling was one of dispossession, starvation and extermination, in which performers and audiences were literally dying out. The ‘unnatural’ context of research and documentation paradoxically provided reprieve and accommodated not just the researcher’s purpose but also the storytellers’ desire to leave a trace of themselves and of their world as they told it. //Kabbo and his contemporaries represented their tradition of storytelling by repeating a store of narratives for preservation, a memorial act in which they were willing participants and which no doubt affected the versions of stories they told.

Although a significant advance on dictation, the tape or video recorder is not inconsequential to the performance itself or to the subsequent transcription and interpretation of the recorded text. Isidore Okpewho provides an illuminating account of how a Mandinka griot addressed the recording context by expounding on the value of the griot’s knowledge and mode of communicating history over those of the scribe. Writing, the griot argued, destroys the faculty of memory, removes the secrecy surrounding treasured knowledge, congeals what should be supple and active, and lacks the authenticity and truth of the orally transmitted narrative. The diatribe against script implicitly accuses the scribe of distorting oral narrative by filling it with the untruths and degraded popularity of the page to which any literate person has access. Okpewho argues that the griot’s assertions can be understood in the context of conventional competition among “soothsayers and chroniclers ... for authority in the relation of experiences in the past as a guide for future conduct” (1992: 65). In this way, the griot interprets the researcher and his recording instruments into Mandinka performance conventions.

The differences between the griot's and the Bushmen storytellers' investments in the recording of their narratives suggests the need for caution in our assessments of what goes on in research contexts of performance. Coplan pronounces too generally that "the ethnographer, like the critic, seeks to categorize and comprehend; the performer to evade categorisation and comprehension" (1994: xiv-xv). The griot in Okpewho's anecdote may have sought this evasion in one way, but Bleek's Bushmen storytellers participated in their patron's project because they wished to be remembered through print. It is equally as problematic to consider that informants respond uniformly in the spirit of resistance to the coercive context of research, as it is to imagine that their narratives provide unmitigated access to 'tradition', or, contrastingly, yield inevitably crippled texts. Coplan argues persuasively that ethnographers often trim from their analyses that which seems opaque or ill fitting "so that the sculptural elegance of the account can be appreciated". Anthropologists, he contends, (and, we could add, literary critics) "no less than missionaries have their projects" (1994: xviii). So do informants and storytellers, however. The textual product is always the result of the expectations and motivations of two parties. That this product is subsequently mediated anew and interpreted by the researcher shifts the power decidedly her/his way, but the event of telling is characterised by contending or actively agreed ideas about what is going on in the recording context.

Discussing the inevitability of researcher intrusion on the storytelling context, even in "near-perfect conditions for the witnessing of Zuni storytelling as it really should be", Tedlock recalls a visit he paid to a Zuni storyteller's home (1983: 285). Unable to decide which story to tell his expectant grandchildren, the storyteller asked Tedlock to make the choice for him, thereby facilitating, though only coincidentally, the ethnographer's interest in timing the length, and assessing another version, of a particular narrative. The storyteller interrupted his performance occasionally to provide metacommentary according to the convention of linking the distant events of narrated history or myth with the present context. Some of the metacommentary was in English, however, and startled Tedlock because "stories are supposed to be devoid of even a single word from such profane non-Indian tongues" (1983: 291). As Tedlock realises, it is within the storyteller's power to include strangers in his address and to dictate the usable codes of exchange with his audience. In the course of the same performance, Tedlock is surprised to discover that the narrator employs in front of children the story's full range of sexual reference, which he had censored in his



version for Tedlock's tape recorder. Tedlock notes that in recording sessions his informant "had been mindful of the larger audience that might lie somewhere on the other side of the tape recorder" (1983: 292). As we saw in the first chapter, Manisi also censored some of his more profane references for print dissemination. For recording purposes, both Tedlock's narrator and Manisi tried to shape their texts according to their imagination of their distant audiences, and their conscious desire to produce interpretable objects.

Opland was greatly influenced by Tedlock's work on dialogical modes of fieldwork, which stresses the need for researchers to acknowledge their shaping presence in recording contexts and to disclose informants' views by quoting informants' own words. The result of Tedlock's influence on Opland is that the latter quotes extensively from his interviews with poets, providing us with invaluable insights into the different motivations and personalities that mark the texts to which we have print access. Yet, however generous the availability of informants' remarks, the reader's access to research context, recorded text, and participant input is always guided by the academic's interpretation of the relationships and texts of which he was a constitutive part. Even in the most scrupulous and detailed scholarship, there is no way of erasing the researcher's imprint on the text when it was performed, although it might be possible to glean something of the poet's contending interests in performance by problematising the scholar's mediating preoccupations.

In the research context in which an audience has been installed for ambience, reception is measurable only through the researcher's mediating questions to audience members or through her/his apprehension of their collective response. As an audience member, her/his reaction is of course a valid and important component of the performance event. In neither case, however, is the audience response, mediated by the researcher's interview agenda or sensibility, sufficient to measure the event because of the presence of the recording device, which always represents other audiences and other potential reaches for the performer and his utterance. We, the readers of transcribed texts, are also obliquely their addressees. According to Bauman:

... the act of recording itself now contributes to and upholds the sense that even one-to-one sessions with a fieldworker implicate larger audiences of strangers: The tapes are to be heard by others, perhaps played to classes, or broadcast, or printed in a book. That makes any recording a public

performance, no matter how intimate the recording session and even in the physical absence of the audience. (1986: 105)

Most performers are well aware of the recording device and of the textual futures it promises. We are reminded of Okpewho's griot, who constructed recording technologies as his competitor, and of //Kabbo, who wished Bleek's transcriptions to transport his stories and some trace of himself to future readers.

In the opening chapters, I argued that Manisi wished his written poetry to be preserved for future readers in the pages of the books he wrote. I shall argue in this chapter that one motivation for Manisi's participation in Opland's research was the idea that his oral poems would become concrete objects that could circulate and endure as tangible legacies both of the characters he built in words and of his talent. But the texts that were to be preserved were also always responses to Opland and the audiences he gathered at events or represented in his writing. In other words, the anonymous audiences made potential by the tape recorder were given shape in Manisi's imagination by Opland's representative presence – it was he, the scholar, who constituted these latent gatherings by making available to them the tapes, transcripts and his interpretations of Manisi's poems. Opland's representative significance for Manisi's poetry suggests again the importance both of the relationship between the two men and of the broader politics of their South African context. My concern is with how Opland shaped the performances he solicited according to his framing research concerns, which I outline in the next section, and with how Manisi tried to assert authority and intention in recording circumstances.

### **Opland's framing concern with improvisation**

Manisi was one of several poets whom Opland recorded during his early fieldwork expeditions in the 1970s. The poems and interviews he collected served as data for his doctoral dissertation, which compared the Anglo-Saxon and Xhosa oral traditions. At that time, Opland's academic approach was directed by his reading of Milman Parry and Albert Lord's study of oral composition. Parry was a Harvard classicist who argued that the Homeric epithets had been composed orally. His fieldwork in Yugoslavia in 1934 and 1935 gathered data from a living oral tradition of epic song in order to extend and concretise his theory of oral composition, which Opland describes as having been "the hottest debate in town" at the time when he began his doctoral

research (2005: 106). Parry's student, Lord, continued his teacher's work and produced *The Singer of Tales*, a widely read, influential and controversial study that argued for the re-conception of 'oral' performance as denoting not merely a mode of presentation, but also the act of textual composition in performance. Opland recalls his reception of Lord's work: "The book electrified me; the study of oral poetic traditions fascinated me; the scholars involved became my heroes" (2005: 105). According to Lord, oral composition is a special technique available exclusively to illiterate poets who, having been apprenticed and trained in the phrases, themes and meter governing their art, can sing spontaneously by fitting readymade phrases and formulae into a strict meter (1960: 4).

Lord argued that performers of memorised poems were not bards but mere reciters who could have learned their material from manuscript as much as from oral tradition (1962: 184-185). Oral composers were the carriers of oral tradition, in Lord's view, and they required formulae to make poetry. The orality of a text is thus discernable from its highly formulaic content, whereas the literate text is characterised by its non-formulaic expression. But the theory was problematic in several respects and has been assailed by criticism: Lord not only insisted on the absolute difference between oral and literate composition and textuality, and denied the possibility of a transitional form of poetry, he also claimed the universal applicability of his theory. Opland's later work concedes the shortcomings in Lord's outlook: texts from different traditions reveal variations in oral style and composition that are not entertained in Lord's theory, and the formula, while always useful to the spontaneous performer, is not essential to oral creativity as Lord asserts it is. Opland also discusses the failure of Lord's central assumption of "the rigid dichotomy between oral and written literature" (1998: 80). Literate poets like Manisi could not be fitted into Parry and Lord's theory. In his later research, Opland reveals that his distinction between improvised and memorised texts was primarily a matter of convenience, but nevertheless it continued to shape his discussion of Xhosa performance especially in comparison with the Zulu tradition of praising, which emphasised elements of textual permanence.

Abidingly loyal to the formative influence on his thinking of Parry and Lord's thesis, and concerned to qualify their theory respectfully, Opland has been preoccupied throughout his work by the need to demonstrate to sceptical audiences the spontaneity of the Xhosa imbongi's performance style:

I never cease to marvel at the Xhosa imbongi's powers of improvisation. Manisi claims that he fashions his elaborate compositions in performance with greater facility than he speaks Xhosa: I believe him. However difficult it might be for some scholars to accept this level of creativity, there can be no doubt that the Xhosa oral poet responds poetically to the immediate inspiration of the moment, on his own evidence and on the testimony of his poetry. When the Xhosa imbongi speaks, we should hear him: he will not repeat himself. (1998: 82)

The statement explains Opland's handling of texts and his purpose in soliciting unconventional, hybrid performances that demonstrate their speakers' capacity for creative improvisation. It also reveals the real source of enduring connection between Opland and the Parry-Lord position – Opland empathises with Parry and Lord because like their oral theory, Opland's focus on improvisation in Xhosa oral poetry has attracted what he considers to be undeserved scepticism and criticism from "armchair critics" (1998: 73). If Opland's data diverges in several important respects from the Parry-Lord theory, it nevertheless accords with that theory in one much contested and central matter: the practice of improvisation in performance.

Opland's emotive assertions in the quoted passage above, underline the ease with which academic writing interprets interview and fieldwork data into its own authoritative version of participants' positions and concerns: when Opland states his belief in Manisi's claims to spontaneity in performance, he implies that the poet himself insisted on this aspect of his art. Interviews show, however, that Manisi was sometimes perplexed by Opland's interest in the compositional origins of his poems, and that he assumed his mode of creativity as a given rather than as a controversial phenomenon which required demonstration and recognition. The debate around improvisation surfaced frequently in the poet's encounters with academics – following Manisi's performance at a conference in Durban in 1985, one participant questioned the dynamics of oral composition and Manisi responded ferociously by launching into a spontaneous poem. A similar exchange occurred in the United States in 1988. It is probable, however, that this academic preoccupation was not in the first instance Manisi's own concern. As I shall discuss in Chapters Five and Six, the two retaliatory texts he produced in response to his 1985 and 1988 challengers respond to their addressees not by referring to the issue of improvisation but rather by

denouncing their subjects on unrelated political grounds – in both cases, the poet interprets academic doubt as racist attack.

It is Opland's concern with improvisation that frames, initially overtly, the 'artificial' contexts of performance he generated. This preoccupation both illuminates and coerces Manisi's performances. If we accept that the oral poet responds to his immediate context, it is contradictory to categorise his compositions before certain audiences as demonstrations, because the idea of demonstration depends on the existence of an original that can be showcased. Opland frames such performances as simulacra but at the same time he claims their originality. His effort to prove the imbongi's spontaneity of creativity by requesting poems on subjects chosen by Opland, responds to the limitations of the fieldwork context. But it is also in a sense self-defeating as a method since the task of performing a poem on an absent subject into a tape recorder limits the poet's possibility for contextually inspired commentary and increases his focus, ironically from Opland's perspective, on the potential for textual permanence represented by the recording device. Poems such as those about Mathanzima, produced at Opland's request, evidence not only the poet's current thinking on his chief, but also his interest in creating a 'complete' text that can achieve solidity of a sort on the record.

### **Solidity and evanescence: the 'Mathanzima' poems**

Opland's first recording session with Manisi produced two poems, one on the subject of Mathanzima and another about the cattle killing tragedy that befell the Xhosa in 1857. The latter poem, which I discuss in the final section about Manisi's narrative izibongo, is built on a subject that was nominated by Opland to test the poet's skill in improvising poetry without any possibility of having thought through his performance prior to its execution. The shifting dynamics of their first meeting are described in *The Dassie* (2005) – after recording poetry by Mabunu, Opland arrived at Manisi's home, anticipating "the acoustic advantages provided by encircling mud walls" (2005: 86). But Manisi did not invite Opland into his house, suggesting rather that they conduct their meeting in the scholar's car. Opland describes how Manisi's assertion of control over the recording session "wrong-footed" him and set him fumbling with his recording instruments (2005: 86).

Before Opland could ask a single question or negotiate a topic for performance, Manisi announced that he would produce a poem about Mathanzima. It is significant for two reasons that the subject of the ensuing poem was decided entirely by Manisi. First, the poet evidently thought his chief an appropriate subject for a recorded poem and one that, given the poet's long association with his chief, would allow Manisi to produce an eloquent izibongo, deserving of preservation and impressive to his listeners. Second, the poem was not framed in its performance by Opland's specific research concerns. That Manisi gave thought to and asserted his own programme of performance indicates his self-assurance as a poet. He knew what it was to be an authoritative performer and clearly he considered academic interest an appropriate forum in which to assert and gain recognition of his talent. At least in one important way, however, his decisiveness was disconcerting for Opland: if the poet had preconceived a topic, how could the scholar be sure that Manisi had not rehearsed the entire performance? It is this concern with textual genesis that directs the interview following Manisi's first recorded poem.

Introducing his subject, Manisi lays claim to his performance space and addresses his audience – Opland and those whom he represents through his recorder – as outsiders to the poet's community and geography:

My chief then is the paramount chief of the Thembu of Rhoda, his majesty Kaiser Daliwonga Mathanzima. This is his land, it is the district of Xonxa, which is known as Glen Grey. We Thembu then, we call it Xonxa. He resides in Cofimvaba, actually at Qamata. His area then in the land of the Thembu is that Xonxa whence came his grandfathers, his grandfather Mathanzima the father of his father's father, as well as Ngangelizwe of the great house, the very sons of Mthikrakra. And so there is Cofimvaba and Cala. Over there Cala is known as Xalanga. The whole of this land is his, all three districts. The Thembu then say when they greet him: ... (86)<sup>2</sup>

Manisi's prose-style introduction of his subject both implicitly marks Opland as an interloper, unaware of the significance of the land in which he goes about his fieldwork, and illuminates Manisi's trio of poetic concerns: with his chief, Mathanzima, with the land to which Mathanzima has rightful claim, and with the ancestry that secures Mathanzima's pedigree and possession of Thembu territory. Mathanzima's inherited ownership of this landscape, the extent and historical reach of

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for poems or extracts from poems refer to their location in Opland 2005.

which Manisi emphasises, is what binds its inhabitants to their leader and causes them to greet him with respectful salutation. The introduction stresses, for an outsider's benefit, Mathanzima's legitimacy as a descendant of great men, and contextualises the poet's address in terms of an order of reference commanded by the izibongo form – identity based on authenticity, legitimacy, historical lineage and geography. Just as landscape thus figured cannot exist without its Xhosa inhabitants, neither chief nor people exist without one another, without the land or without their ancestors. Each element is mutually dependent. In like manner, the poet depends on his staple subjects – identity, community, land and ancestry – while they in turn depend for their unity and animation upon his poetry's binding, vocative force.

Manisi's statement that his words will repeat those of the collective he represents is a claim for the authenticity and authority of his poem's address. The opening praise name, 'Daliwonga' ('Maker of Majesty'), was the usual salutation by which the Thembu addressed Mathanzima. What follows, however, is not simply the community's but also, and in its commentary and arrangement uniquely, the poet's creative assessment of his subject. Manisi's claims to ventriloquise his local audiences clearly suggest his interest in setting down that which has solidity in his people's exchange with their leader, and can testify to Thembu custom as a venerable object, worth preserving. Manisi's early fieldwork poems on Mathanzima come closest to Opland's category of demonstration. For instance, the poet shifts from his opening address of the outsider to his customary address of Thembu and Crowds of Ndaba, and his assertion that his words repeat Thembu address of Mathanzima appear to construct the poem as polished exhibition piece, produced for inspection. However, the poem reveals its creative excesses and inspirations: it is an unusually long poem, marked by the poet's signatures and interrupted midway by Manisi's unheeded assertion that he will conclude his address. Despite its pursuit of plenitude in expressing Mathanzima's identity as fully as performance permits and the record will absorb, Manisi's poem also has considerable coherence and raises several concerns that the poet will repeat throughout his association with white interlocutors.

The opening praise names represent solid components of Manisi's poems about Mathanzima, names that recur and embody their subject whether negatively or positively inflected by their context of utterance:

Hail, Maker of Majesty!  
 Hail, Maker of Majesty!  
 He's majesty personified,  
 he's magisterial in rank, a master of learning.  
 He's the stars who disagree with the sun,  
 they usually consort with the moon:  
 they fear the sun because of the heat.  
 I believe he's the powerful land;  
 despite its power the sky's defeated it.  
 "Yish" goes the caterpillar,  
 eating mimosa, eating cat-thorn;  
 let's eat mimosa and leave it at that,  
 for our chief is reviled;  
 let's eat mimosa and leave it at that,  
 for our chief is uneasy.  
 He's Action, sitting tense on his legs like a bird:  
 when it squats they say it sits,  
 when it lifts they say "It's off."  
 He's "I'm your creature, Greed:  
 I wolfed down the morsel with ashes still on it;  
 yet my status precludes me from cooking myself:  
 as the lofty holder of Mthikrakra's place,  
 Ndaba's, Zondwa's, Thatho's and Sokhawulela's,<sup>3</sup>  
 others should cook and entertain me."  
 There then's the chief of this region,  
 the stalwart son of Mhlobo,  
 a manly figure who acts decisively,  
 a manly figure, son of Gwebibango's sister,  
 who preserves black sticks in safety,  
 who preserves black sticks in dung:  
 we'll reclaim them when we go below Table Mountain  
 to discuss the claims of the land of Ndaba.  
 Oh this chief of mine of the Right Hand House!  
 Oh this chief of mine of the ancestors!  
 He's long sprouts,  
 he's stately arms for bearing the Thembu. (87)

The poet emphasises his chief's definitive majesty and magisterial learning to suggest both his inherited and self-made glory. However, as always in Manisi's assessment, Mathanzima is a figure of excess and ambition – he assumes novel positions, and he is not more powerful than the sky, symbol to the earth of cosmic order and hence of man's limited power as designed by fate.

The poet's signature, that of the caterpillar which eats mimosa, represents Manisi as the poet of an isolated chief. The mimosa tree grows separately from other

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<sup>3</sup> These are important Thembu ancestors. See Note on Genealogy.



plants, and while part of nature, is isolated from nature's abundance and profusion. This isolation is ambiguous – it subverts a natural order of community but nevertheless emulates one of nature's existing patterns and suggests distinction. Mathanzima is rightfully powerful but he is also solitary and unpopular for the particular ways in which he manifests his power. Sometimes the poet suggests the negative nature of his chief's distinction and at other times he commends Mathanzima's extraordinariness. Manisi's signature is a complex assertion of loyalty to his chief – his lot is thrown in with his reviled subject, and his identity as poet of this figure is subject to the same charges of distinction as is Mathanzima's. Similarly, assertions of his chief's perplexing greed and self-concern, spoken in part in Mathanzima's voice, are followed by Manisi's avid claims for his subject's masculine strength as the outstanding preserver of black sticks, of Thembu right and potential, and crucially of powerful claim to land. Despite the porous possibilities of Mathanzima's settled praise names, the poet emphasises his chief's dignity as a royal descendant and his importance as the powerful, if perplexing, hope of the Thembu.

Manisi turns from introducing his subject to an outsider, to address his imagined interlocutors: those "Crowds of Ndaba" that are ever the desired audience of his written poetry:

So then, crowds of Ndaba,  
 ignore my words but look where I'm pointing,  
 I'm pointing at the land of a man with no fear,  
 the mighty son of Nogate,  
 handsome from afar like the Pleiades.<sup>4</sup>  
 Hail, Maker of Majesty,  
 lofty holder of Mathanzima's place,  
 scion of the house of his mother Nosarha.  
 He's the thornless breadplant reputedly prickly,  
 how much more so if it had thorns!  
 Ochre enhances him without his applying it,  
 how much more so if he did!  
 There then's this chief of Rhoda,  
 Ndaba's puzzling Rhoda.  
 There then's this chief, he's a kestrel,  
 a chief adorned with clay  
 where other chiefs wear leopard skin.  
 So then, Thembu,

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<sup>4</sup> The Pleiades is the star constellation that marks the years of manhood in Xhosa custom. When Manisi discusses the distribution of stars among the nations, he always assigns the Pleiades to the Thembu.

let me make an end,  
 for the son of a chief is lofty,  
 he's one who speaks at Qamata and mountains resound,  
 he's one who speaks at Qamata and Lukhanji's<sup>5</sup> won over,  
 he speaks at Qamata and chiefs fart it on to each other,  
 he speaks at Qamata and the Mpondo hear him,  
 he calls at Qamata and the Gcaleka hear him,  
 he speaks at Qamata and Mshweshwe's folk hear him.<sup>6</sup>  
 So then, let the boy pass unopposed,  
 for he left Qamata and strode on his way:  
 he seemed to linger in the Qamata valley,  
 yet the boy was drawing his strength.  
 He emerged from Mvani canyon  
 to come to a halt below Qelekequshe<sup>7</sup>,  
 yet he craved education, the pith of life.  
 He strode when we sent him to Stewart's,<sup>8</sup>  
 strode as he roughed up the ruffians,  
 the ruffians raised a ruckus in reaction to the rumbling,  
 a rumbling raising prospects of flatulence,  
 a flatulent fart as the prince passes by.  
 The Mutton Gluttons button their eyes on him  
 batten down their hatches,  
 in his quest for the pith of prudence  
 to power the nation he pilots. (88-89)

In addressing the Thembu, Manisi occupies his customary role of mediator between chief and community. From the vantage point of the full corpus of his recorded poetry, Manisi's disclaimer, "ignore my words", seems to foreshadow his later protestations of obscurity and unimportance before American academics, but in this address he asserts authoritatively his own idea of justice, achieved when the weight of inheritance is met by the courage of the incumbent individual. The puzzles that follow – Mathanzima as the thornless breadplant, as one who spurns ochre (a traditional cosmetic), and as a clay-wearer while his peers don leopard skin – focus on the ambiguity of their subject. Mathanzima neglects tradition, but he is also extraordinary, decisive and individual. The poet wishes, perhaps, that Mathanzima would attend to certain aspects of his identity and comportment, but also celebrates his 'kestrel' chief who soars above others.

<sup>5</sup> Lukhanji is a mountain situated north west of Queenstown. See Map.

<sup>6</sup> Mshweshwe (also spelt: Moshweshwe or Moshoeshoe) was the famous king of the Sotho, whose landlocked country is known as the mountain kingdom of Lesotho. He ruled between 1786 and 1870 and is regarded as the father of the Sotho nation. He won protectorate status from the British in 1868 following an attack by the Afrikaners. In this way, he maintained the autonomy of 125 000 Sotho.

<sup>7</sup> Qelekequshe is a hill near Alice.

<sup>8</sup> "Stewart's" refers to Lovedale, the first principal of which was James Stewart.

In these rich and compact praises we see something of the typical operation of the izibongo form. Critics have tried to settle particular poems into categories of praise or criticism<sup>9</sup> but to do so divests the form of its central capacity to evoke the entangled qualities and values of human identity. Praise, criticism, and variously emotive observation all inhere in such efforts because people bear richly accreted identities. Context, surrounding commentary, and poetic addition and omission give particular interpretation to names, but even in their suddenly certain application, these names always signal their potential to mean differently on a new occasion. In this performance for the record, Manisi is concerned with producing a plenitude of names and identifying references, and with expanding Mathanzima's textual identity to celebrate its rich ambiguities and possibilities. We see the poet revelling in his own skill at making and contending with complexity.

Manisi is not tempted to limit himself even though he sees an opportunity to conclude his address when he announces "So then Thembu,/ Let me make an end". Instead, he moves swiftly into another of his rhythmic set pieces. Referring to his subject, Mathanzima:

he's one who speaks at Qamata and mountains resound,  
 he's one who speaks at Qamata and Lukhanji's won over,  
 he speaks at Qamata and chiefs fart it on to each other,  
 he speaks at Qamata and the Mpondo hear him,  
 he calls at Qamata and the Gcaleka hear him,  
 he speaks at Qamata and Mshweshwe's folk hear him.

The segment represents Mathanzima's mighty influence as a conversation between landscape and nations, and provides the backdrop against which Manisi unfolds a short biography of his chief, itself a historical geography that stresses the chief's freedom of mobility and investment in place. But it is here, in the poet's description of Mathanzima's movement through place, that the problem presents itself. Although Mathanzima roughs up these ruffians whom he meets, they are an ominous presence in his path and will become his abusers in Manisi's later poetry.

In the final part of the poem, Manisi returns to his principal focus on the nation, the land, and Mathanzima, their mandated protector and unifier:

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<sup>9</sup> S. J. Neethling, for example, characterises the bulk of an izibongo performed by the famous contemporary imbongi Zolani Mkiva as a "scorn poem" rather than a "praise poem" (2001: 56).

There then's that nation now  
 as he ranges through Thembu valleys.  
 He stands at the great place of Dalindyebo  
 passionately appealing,  
 Umtata kestrels soar and applaud him,  
 they stop their flitting and flutter  
 just like ants  
 building the royal prince's parlour.  
 Hail, Maker of Majesty!  
 You've established Thembu majesty,  
 you've drawn the Thembu together,  
 you addressed the Thembu and moulded them,  
 so Thembu joined Rharhabe,  
 and so we live with Manzezulu  
 who stirs things up all over the place,  
 Mfanta's son's fantasies stir things up,  
 for his father's bones lie trembling,  
 he wants all the bulls to paw the same ground  
 with their gaze fixed firmly on Robben Island  
 where the bones of Mfanta rest,  
 outcast and swelling,  
 expecting the Thembu to raise a cry  
 to shock the Xhosa to action.  
 Shut it up and leave it alone,  
 say no more: the country's on tenterhooks. I'm finished.  
 Hail Maker of Majesty!  
 Live long, son of the king.  
 May he dish up for himself and eat,  
 may he eat and dish up for all black people  
 for this black land's on tenterhooks. I'm finished.  
 I conclude and stand firm,  
 confirmed and immutable. (89)

Mathanzima's great work of establishing Thembu unity and of attaching Thembu identity to that of the Rharhabe (one of the two principal houses of the main Xhosa line) is qualified by the poet's call for Thembu action to redress historical injustices that continue to divide and weaken the nation. The imprisonment and death in exile of Mfanta, one of Manisi's recurrent concerns, returns us to the ominous presence and power of those who would destroy the strength and illustrious lineage of the leadership the poet has been celebrating. The poem has led up to this call, then, for action against indignity, dispossession and abuse.

At the same time, however, the poet expresses the need to silence himself, recognising the explosiveness of his political and speaking context: "Shut it up and

leave it alone,/ say no more: the country's on tenterhooks. I'm finished". Just as before, he continues past his conclusion, exhorting Mathanzima to provide not only for his own needs but for those of his people also. Manisi's concluding signature ('I conclude and stand firm,/ confirmed and immovable') is one of his most powerful captured on record – we hear a poet testifying to his convictions, unrestrained by the cautions he administers himself. The fullness of the poem's expression of its subject suggests Manisi's desire to record a substantial and tangible object that can recall its mighty subject to imagination. But the final section of the izibongo evidences the poet's other, urgent concern with the restoration of Xhosa dignity and right in the context of broad national tension in which his recorder, Opland, is also implicated. In asserting his emphatic vocal presence, Manisi refuses to shrink from either the volatile moment or the enduring record. In addressing posterity with the fixed praises of a great figure, Manisi also addresses himself to the demands of the present, represented by the legacy of Mfanta's tragic death in exile. In this way the poem looks to the past for the roots of Mathanzima's legitimacy. It also looks to the present by speaking in the precarious moment of urgent need, and it packages all of these concerns for preservation and examination in the safe house of academic study.

The complexity and power of the poet's performance are recorded in Opland's description of its aftermath in the confined space of his car, which had become "utterly crammed with the sound of Manisi's voice" (2005: 90). Of Manisi he recalls: "I couldn't quite make him out. He was inscrutable ...", and of himself: "I felt disembodied, as if I were the object of research" (2005: 90). Opland's sense of the poet's control of the context suggests something of the authority Manisi was able to impose on his listeners in performance, despite his many protestations of his own insignificance. It also suggests the unyielding ambiguity that characterised both Manisi's poetry and his solitary, haughty person.

Trying to regain an even footing, Opland's interview questions prioritise his concern with the issue of improvisation. Manisi's responses, on the other hand, reveal his uncertainty about the scholar's precise interests:

O: When the ordinary tribesmen make up poems, would they be different from the poems of the imbongi?

M: Well, sometimes others could quote from the imbongi, but they cannot do it, all of them. And others cannot even sing a word from their own meditations.

O: What do you mean 'quote from an imbongi'? Do they listen to, let's say, you, do they listen to the words you say and then use them, use the same words?

M: They do sometimes listen to the imbongi praising the chief and then they would repeat it.

O: The same words?

M: Not actually the same word, but the theme.

O: The same theme?

M: Yes.

O: When you sing, do you make up what you're singing while you're singing it, every time?

M: How do you mean by making it up?

O: I mean that you're not memorising: this song that you've just sung now to Daliwonga—

M: No, it's from my mentalities.

O: Yes, but it's not—the words that you sing are not—If I asked you to sing the same song, you wouldn't—

M: I wouldn't do it.

O: —use the same words.

M: I wouldn't do it now.

O: No, but you wouldn't—

M: I would do something else now.

O: —use the same words. But you wouldn't use the same words that you used. This is not a song that you hold in your mind?

M: The theme is the same, but I wouldn't use the same words—

O: The theme?

M: —in the same way I was doing.

O: That's right: the theme is the same, but the words differ.

M: Yes.

O: So each time you sing, each time you praise your chief, you will make up different words while you're singing?

M: Yes.

O: You haven't got it memorised and kept in your mind?

M: No.

O: You don't sing the same words every time you sing?

M: No, I don't do it. (Opland 2005: 92-93)

What is perhaps most interesting about this exchange is that while Opland tries to get at whether the words of poems about the same subject change from performance to performance, Manisi believes Opland's questions are actually concerned with when next he can perform on the same subject. The poet repeats: "I wouldn't do it ... I wouldn't do it now ... I would do something else now" (2005: 93). As far as Manisi is concerned, he has produced his version of Mathanzima for the occasion and will not be pressed to perform another. This suggests both the poet's awareness of Opland's soliciting imperatives and his sense that, even in such alien circumstances of

declamation, it would be inappropriate to produce a poem merely to satisfy scholarship.

In Manisi's understanding, the Mathanzima poem he had just produced had expressed something provisionally complete – that is, complete for that occasion. The danger in Opland's pursuit of his early research concern with improvisation was that in trying to amass evidence for the imbongi's powers of spontaneous composition he did not give sufficient attention to the possibility that Manisi had a particular intention in mind when he improvised and that once that intention was met in performance there was no purpose, from Manisi's perspective, in creating another version until a new inspiration presented itself. If early ethnographers and linguists skewed our understanding of oral literature by insisting on a definitive version of a narrative or poem, later efforts to acknowledge the evanescence of the performance event and its texts have perhaps gone too far in the opposite direction by insisting on the absolute transience and impermanence of oral textuality. Both text and event, while infused with and inseparable from their contexts, are also recognisably detachable from the everyday flow of transient speech and activity in which we all drift. On the occasions on which Manisi was recorded for Opland's fieldwork, the poet sought to produce relevant texts that would acquire solidity and longevity on the record. This does not mean that his poems were not spontaneously produced – improvisation was his mode of production, undiminished by his premeditation on themes and purpose in expression.

Manisi's second recorded izibongo on the subject of Mathanzima shows how solid names and references can be modified by new contexts of expression. The poem was produced in 1972, in the course of another of Opland's fieldwork expeditions, this time in the company of Morton Bloomfield (an American professor of English at Harvard University) and Richard Mfamana, who assisted Opland in some of his fieldwork outings and subsequent textual translations. Having found Manisi on his return journey from business in Qamata, the academics and their subject "found a suitable wayside location under three straggly trees" (2005: 110) where they could record performance undisturbed. Opland recalls that he had wanted to impress Bloomfield with Manisi's talent and had requested a poem about Mathanzima, wanting perhaps to acquire a comparative text for the Mathanzima poem he had netted at their first meeting. Manisi must have desired the opportunity to record another

poem and found his small audience stimulating for he produced a lengthy poem that is rich in images and reversals, and candidly critical in parts.

The izibongo begins with familiar praise names and set pieces that invoke Daliwonga's eminence, lineage, restlessness and greed. But there are several interpretive additions: Mathanzima is designated "a great tome of the whites,/ who confronted sages and scholars". It was not unusual for Manisi to identify his chief in terms of his superior education. When Manisi wished to stress Mathanzima's distinction and resilient intelligence, the reference was positive, but, at other times, when the poet sought to castigate Mathanzima's abuse of his privileges and his association with white deceit, the reference was damning. Here Manisi's invocation of his chief's education is unusually placed in an introductory position, so that, together with references to Mathanzima's isolation as "the chief of mimosa and cat-thorn", his education and association with white scholars and sages are heralded as principal identifying factors. The reference is highly ambivalent and works as an ambiguous comment not only on Mathanzima, but on the poet's academic audience:

Hail Daliwonga!  
So this is the chief of mimosa and cat-thorn,  
a great tome of the whites  
who confronted sages and scholars. (110)

Mathanzima is in league with whites – according to the image, he is their book and they have written him. But complicit in and dependent on white design as he is, Mathanzima also confronts scholars and proves able to talk back to those who taught him. In praising his educated subject, Manisi himself confronts sages and scholars.

If the poet recalls his chief's potential, however, he does not construct Mathanzima as a hero. Following his set piece Greed monologue, which in other poems is relatively mildly critical ("I am your creature, Greed,/ so I swallowed the tidbit with ashes,/ yet I cannot roast for myself:/ I'm the acknowledged tower of Thatho's place"), Manisi emphasises the ugliness of his chief's grotesque self-concern: "He swells like the strands on a ripening maize cob,/ Mhlobo's darkskin bloats germinating" (110). On this occasion, Manisi's poem is preoccupied with the division of loyalties he perceives in his chief's choices and behaviour. On the one hand he is a book of the whites that might resist scholars, and on the other he is a



powerful prince of the nation whom mountains and rivers hail but who nevertheless ignores his own supporters in favour of seeking influence among foreigners:

So then, crowds of Ndaba!  
 So then, crowds of Sokhawulela!  
 The tower crossed over;  
 he once crossed the sea to English Britain;  
 on the day he reached England  
 the Heaths were puzzled, the Wilsons vanished  
 at the animal's son's arrival  
 from the home of Mthikrakra, sour tree spurned by goats.  
 This then's our topic, chief of mimosa and cat-thorn,  
 for he's the chief who herds forest dwellers.  
 But this Hala chief's a problem:  
 we gave him a throwing spear and he smashed it,  
 we gave him a stabbing spear and he smashed it,  
 then we gave him learning and he worked on it. (111)

And, pursuing the same theme shortly thereafter:

When he speaks at Qamata all rivers resound;  
 he speaks below Mngqanga  
 and the mountains echo in Thatho's territory;  
 when he speaks Mount Mngqanga<sup>10</sup> appears to tremble,  
 but it's Lukhanji that replies,  
 while in the west Lukhanji turns  
 to face the mountain of Qoyi  
 over the town of Engcobo,  
 where Ngubengcuka lies buried;  
 when he speaks even Zingxondo's aroused,  
 ready to serve as a base for resistance,  
 but Mhlobo's boy  
 finds friends in strange nations  
 and looms like a tower above it. (111)

Whereas his people provide him with the tools associated with their history (represented as traditional spears) and have certain expectations of their chief, Mathanzima chooses blunted foreign implements, such as formal education, and leaves his home in need. Although he has power in his territory, he "finds friends in strange nations" and "looms like a tower" above Zingxondo, the mountain that had offered him support. The implication is that Mathanzima has alienated himself from his own supporters by considering the resources of his white allies superior, and

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<sup>10</sup> Mngqanga is a mountain near Umtata. See Map.

consequently might represent a threat to his own place because his power is disproportionate to that which custom permits.

Like the first poem about Mathanzima that Manisi produced for Opland in 1970, this izibongo charts its subject's progress in terms of his movement through the country. Once again, there are menacing villains on the map – not farmers this time, but white South Africans generally, who hoard learning and use it to maintain their power. Manisi is sympathetic to Mathanzima's search for this same education:

On that day he entered Alice  
in search of the wisdom of whites,  
kept hoarded for safekeeping,  
for rednecks' sons to use  
in keeping control of his country. (112)

But the poet's concern is with the use to which foreign resources are put. Mathanzima is represented as having been corrupted by his involvement with white power and education, and as having spurned authorities and customs that legitimise and temper his inherited mandate.

The closing lines of the poem repeat the poet's opening assertion of his subject's isolation and empathise with the brutality and difficulties he faces:

So then we have nothing to say, for we say  
this chief's the chief of mimosa and cat-thorn,  
with wounds in the past and the future.  
His cattle are scattered at Thatho's place,  
for he's herdsman of bickering people;  
he gathers together diverse flocks.  
I disappear! (113)

Although his cattle are scattered and his people internally divided, Mathanzima ensures their unity in the comforting rural image of the flock. For Manisi, although he strongly disapproves of his chief's present behaviour, Mathanzima always represents potential: he remains the rightful shepherd of his people with skill enough to rally those who look to him despite the obstacles that face them.

Opland contends that this poem represents Manisi's thinking at the time he produced it: "... his poems about Mathanzima were not fixed texts transmitted immutably, although certain lines and turns of phrase tended to recur" (2005: 113).

For Opland, the poem is “overwhelmingly negative” in its “assessment of Mathanzima’s character and achievements”, and despite several stock phrases attesting to his chief’s stature and education, Manisi presents “a figure mocked and derided for his policies, whose people suffer deprivation” (2005: 113). It is clear that the 1972 poem embeds within its citation of ambiguous images and references, several vigorously critical comments. These give the later performance its particular address of the political present. Manisi’s harsh assessment of Mathanzima’s educated white cohorts, for instance, appropriates the text’s immediate academic receivers into his poem’s economy of criticism. However, Opland’s small acknowledgement of Manisi’s recurrent lines and turns of phrase gives insufficient credit to that which endures across Manisi’s poetry. These intertextual threads give Manisi’s poems and his subjects their partially object-like quality and create both poem and subject as reservoirs of constant potential. Even at his most critical, Manisi always builds his poetic address on a solid, underlying faith in the latent, inherited potential of his subjects, and expresses and encourages these qualities in a full rehearsal of the names and references that revivify what is unique in them. There is no need to downplay either Manisi’s powerful improvisatory skill, by which he matches text to context, or his reapplication of settled references that evaporate with their utterance but leave tangible residues by appearing again in subsequent performance.

Discussing the repeated use of inspired oriki, Barber notes that Yoruba epithets are

valued all the more for coming from the past, and bringing with them something of its accumulated capabilities, the attributes of earlier powers. In performance they are recycled and recomposed, but they also retain their essential core. ... Oriki can thus be a thread that leads back into an otherwise irrevocable social history. Sometimes, listening to these texts in your mind’s ear, you may have the sensation of a door opening onto a lost but still adjacent world. ... Through the condensed eloquence of oriki it is evoked and brought once more into view. (1991: 14)

Barber argues that oriki work by simultaneously illuminating the past and the present: “[t]hey are the principal means by which a living relationship with the past is daily apprehended and reconstituted in the present” (1991: 15). Her eloquent discussion invites us to value what endures as well as what is newly coined in praise poetry. If we consider her account in relation to Manisi’s poems about Mathanzima, it becomes

possible to apprehend the powers exercised by repeated names and references. It is by means of these remembered phrases that Manisi recalls Mathanzima's historical selves alongside the new names and comments that invoke the present manifestation of his character.

These old references help the poet to conjure up a subject that has dimension and potential, and who is held to account for his present behaviour by the promise and weakness he has shown in the past. In Manisi's world of increasing dislocation and disempowerment, these remembered phrases assert the poet's authority to name his subject definitively and enduringly. The praise poet's special power rests in his dual capacity to repeat epithets, references and comments that recall a character he has constructed in the past, and to create spontaneously new names and assessments that respond both to the context of utterance and to the historical yardstick of character offered by what is recalled from past performance. The dominant propensity of the poem, whether critical or positive or ambivalent, is to open around its subjects, adjacent pathways of possibility that they can choose at any time. A poem always expresses what its subject is and has been, but more importantly it asserts what that subject might and ought to become.

The 1972 poem has a strong, negative voice among its several voices, but this negativity is not the legacy of the poet's performance, except in its association with a particular moment of speech. On the record, the poem testifies to that moment at which the poet encounters his interlocutors as part of the larger group of educated whites who tempt Mathanzima with promises of power. What endures beyond the poem and its recorded incarnations are those elements that linger from past performances and that will succeed into subsequent poems, such as the Transkei 'independence' izibongo I considered in the previous chapter. These anchor their subject in his obligations, calling repeatedly for his fidelity to his people and to his true identity as the prince of a nation in need.

### **Inventing narratives for the record**

Parry and Lord's theory of oral composition was conceived in relation to traditions of epic narrative. In order to establish whether Manisi could perform narrative izibongo, and whether he could respond immediately in spontaneous poetry to subjects proposed by outsiders, Opland asked the poet to perform several poems on historical

topics. In interview questions, Opland laboured to ascertain whether the subjects he nominated had ever before formed part of Manisi's oral repertoire. In response, Manisi maintained that he knew the histories into which Opland was inquiring. For the poet, the question of whether or not he had previously performed those histories was irrelevant. The exchange between scholar and poet prior to Manisi's performance of his 1970 narrative poem about Nongqawuse suggests that, while Opland was trying to ascertain the potential of his nominated topic to test Manisi's improvisatory skills, Manisi seems to have considered Opland's questions a challenge to his historical knowledge rather than his ability to produce spontaneous poetic response.

Opland has often remarked of the narrative *izibongo* he extracted from Manisi that they are highly 'unnatural' texts. Historical *izibongo* are not performed in the Xhosa oral tradition, although Manisi insisted to Opland in their earliest meeting that, while he could not say whether other poets could perform in this way, "I myself, I feel I can do it" (2005: 96). To the poet it did not matter whether his artistic tradition encompassed such forms – he, talented *imbongi* and retainer of voluminous historical knowledge, could produce admirable experimental texts for Opland's inspection and for the record. Manisi's desire to use his great talent ought not to be brushed aside by the realisation that what he produced for Opland's satisfaction was strange and unprecedented. Indeed, these odd texts reveal a great deal about how Manisi conceived of the record and its audiences. They also reflect their creator's willingness and special ability to exceed the boundaries of his genre, and to create new textualities and purposes in address.

The first three narrative *izibongo* produced by Manisi engage with subjects that testify to what the poet calls in each of the three poems, stories of "shame and disgrace" for the Xhosa nation. Whether Opland realised that his choices of topic were all thus related is unclear, but the problem of having to represent shameful black histories to a white audience in 1970s apartheid South Africa, and for their record, makes Manisi's handling of his subjects all the more fascinating, particularly when we consider that in his published poetry he frequently assumes the mantle of political historian.

The first of the fieldwork narratives deals with the tragic cattle killing of 1856-1857, an event of catastrophic consequence to the Xhosa people, who, having believed the false prophecy of a young girl, burnt their crops and destroyed their cattle. They had been promised the resurrection of their dead, the restoration of

plenitude and peace in their land, and the destruction of the colonial presence. When none of these things happened, the nation succumbed to mass starvation. In his poem, Manisi expresses his astonishment and fury over the event. In particular, he is alarmed that elders and men believed a young girl whom, the poet insists, ancestors would not deign to address, especially on the subject of cattle which is the preserve of men. Opland has given considerable attention to the performance, describing its trace in print as an, albeit atypical, tribute to the poet's art (1998: 102). It is indeed a remarkable poem, rich in imagery and dramatic in its arrangement of events and description of demise. But it is also uncertain in many respects about what and who caused the devastating episode.

In what becomes a pattern in Manisi's representation of shameful internal events, the Nongqawuse poem begins with a vision of peace, harmony and prosperity in Gcaleka territory, that area east of the Kei River in which the prophecy was first proclaimed and first believed. Mostert's account of the event shows that at the time, lung disease was rapidly spreading among Gcaleka cattle, and, already desperate about the state of their herds, the Gcaleka were also terrified of the rapid advance on their territory of colonial influence (1992: 1177-1179, 1186-1187). Manisi mentions none of these things, nor does he concern himself with the fact that the revered paramount Xhosa chief, Sarhili, was open to occult influence and believed absolutely in Nongqawuse's prophecies (Mostert 1992: 1185, 1189). Indeed, Mostert argues that the decisive moment in the cattle killing phenomenon was when Sarhili "declared himself a Believer" (1992: 1189). What Manisi wishes to show his white audience is an Edenic vision of Xhosa territory prior to its occupation by colonials. To do so, he implicitly denies many of the factors historians have found important in explaining Gcaleka vulnerability to Nongqawuse's attractive promises. The question of blame is answered sketchily at the end of a performance in which Manisi is primarily concerned to contrast, in dramatic style, the desolation of Xhosa land and nation following the cattle killing with their previous state of near-perfection.

There is a briefly entertained suggestion that the nation merely succumbed to Nongqawuse's seductive charms. But this is quickly followed by the poet's insistence that she too was duped by "witchcraft unheard of in Phalo's land". The reference is bitter: Christianity which had come to sweep aside what colonial culture perceived as witchcraft, is itself labelled witchcraft for the evil it brought in its wake. Manisi claims in conclusion:

All our troubles came with conversion:  
 embracing God we took up the Bible  
 rank as it was with evil incarnate,  
 held by a man who looked to the west,  
 clerical collar prim in front  
 secured at the back by a butterfly stud,  
 behind his back a cannon concealed  
 looms into view as he opens his mouth  
 and blasts to bits those before him.  
 As the country reeled in confusion  
 the missionaries cut a clear line,  
 urging peace and calm on all.  
 That great dog of dogs, the child of Grey,  
 Big George, the son of Grey,<sup>11</sup>  
 claimed he was just rearranging the land,  
 yet in this time of disgrace and shame  
 he stood to one side shading his eyes,  
 counting the corpses in mounting piles.  
 The Xhosa lay stark with not one shot fired,  
 clawing ahead on their bellies,  
 ducking the cannon as they made for their killers!  
 I disappear!!  
 I disappear. (101-102)

The image of the missionary man with his bible and his cannon is the fullest expression of what would become a trope in Manisi's poetry for white audiences. It is possible that Manisi blames a division of belief among Xhosa people for the cattle killing, but this offers no real explanation of the events of 1856-1857. What preoccupies the poet is the aftermath of the cattle killing and how white administrators used the weakness of the Xhosa nation against it to reassign territory. A close reading of the poem as a whole reveals that the poet is so dumbfounded by the event itself that he cannot supply reasons for its occurrence. His critical engagement with white behaviour, which exacerbated the indignity and desperation of the Xhosa situation, deflects our attention from any possible Xhosa blame, even that which the poet assigns to the prophet herself. The poem's final image is startling and chilling. It foresees the inevitable revenge slaughtered masses will take against their white killers

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<sup>11</sup> Sir George Grey was the British Colonial Administrator to the Cape Colony at the time of the cattle killing.

– not those who occasioned the cattle killing itself but those who made it impossible for the Xhosa to recover themselves and their territory after the event.

In 1971, Opland undertook another fieldwork expedition to Transkei, this time in the company of an American academic, Richard Moyer, to whom Opland wished to “show David off” (2005: 108). The occasion produced two narrative izibongo, one on the battle of Amalinde and another, “Thuthula”, on Ngqika’s abduction of his uncle’s wife, both of which Opland has largely ignored in his writing because he considers them unsuccessful and inferior texts. Produced in unpropitious circumstances by the roadside and in the presence of Moyer, whom Manisi did not appear to trust, the performances are also tainted in Opland’s memory by his own feelings of guilt about his early treatment of Manisi as an object to display to others.

The battle of Amalinde was fought in 1818 between the followers of Ngqika and those of Ndlambe, the two rival chiefs, nephew and uncle respectively, who ruled in separate territories the Rharhabe, the Right Hand nation of the Xhosa. It was a war significantly influenced by the famous prophets of the two leaders, respectively Ntsikana and Makana (Nxele). Ntsikana was a Christian convert whose complex outlook matched that of Manisi. Ntsikana accepted the word of God but advised rejection of the drastic changes to Xhosa lifestyle that white incursion brought. However, his increasingly unpopular chief, Ngqika, collaborated with white colonials against their mutual foes, including Ndlambe, whose power to attract Ngqika’s supporters the younger chief greatly feared. Ndlambe’s prophet, Makana, had begun his career as a Christian convert but had quickly adapted his religious beliefs to his black nationalist perspective, claiming that he served the black God against the God of the whites who would be defeated along with his white followers by black power. Unlike Ntsikana’s nationalism, which was cautionary and centred on peaceful negotiation (as Manisi’s would be in the context of apartheid), Makana’s nationalism was militant and in Mostert’s terms “exhortatory” (Mostert 1992: 463). Ntsikana was the historical figure to which Manisi was most strongly attached.

As retaliation for Ngqika’s alliance with colonials, for whose satisfaction Ngqika repeatedly accused Ndlambe’s followers of cattle thieving, Makana prepared to provoke the Ngqika out of their safe territory in the Amatola mountains onto flat ground by stealing some of their cattle. Ntsikana understood the ruse for what it was, but Ngqika was swayed by his generals on the issue of pride and descended to find terrible war awaiting him. Mostert describes the battle of Amalinde as having no



precedent in Xhosa warfare because it was merciless and sought conclusion in death and defeat (1992: 466-467). Ngqika's forces were badly beaten, but the colonial response was swift. Entreated by Ngqika himself, a commando led by Lieutenant-Colonel Brereton fired blindly at the bush into which Ndlambe's forces had retreated, killing large numbers of cattle and men. In Mostert's appraisal, "[t]he commando inflicted unhealing wounds on the attitudes of the Xhosa generation that was principally to confront the British during the decades ahead" (1992: 468)

Manisi's poem begins with a lengthy episode recalling Ntsikana's conversion to Christianity. In Manisi's version of events, Ngqika accepts Ntsikana's influence because "[t]hey were children of the same tribe in the land" of their ancestors. As in the Nongqawuse poem, Manisi paints a picture of harmonious nationhood in which change can be accommodated peacefully and in accordance with the dictates of Xhosa tradition. Once the prophet's message was spread to other Xhosa communities, however, "men of rank began to argue". Nevertheless, according to the poet, Ntsikana stood firm and declared the Lord's message. The implication is that the men of rank would have settled down into acceptance. However, Makana makes his disruptive entrance onto the scene:

He proclaimed his message among the Ndlambe  
Saying, "Do you see this disturbance taking place?  
Do you see this rift developing?  
For today Ntsikana's preaching,  
And Ntsikana wants to unite the tribes of Rharhabe".  
(Opland Collection: 710217.1)

Manisi places self-indicting words in Makana's mouth, asserting that he knew the temporary rift occasioned by Ntsikana's prophecies would heal and that the message would ultimately unite the divisions of the Rharhabe. Manisi's purpose here is to represent Makana as having a vested interest in continued division. It is in response to Makana's oratory that friction beset the Rharhabe:

That is when the men began  
To sharpen their weapons  
As it was the country of brave men as usual  
When they looked against one another  
They became eager to attack one another  
Like lions and leopards attacking bulls.  
(Opland Collection: 710217.1)

Significantly, Manisi argues that it is Makana's messages that led Ndlambe astray and set uncle against nephew in a doubly unnatural war – battle among family and Xhosa. There is no discussion of Ngqika's weak leadership, his alliances with colonials prior to the battle, or his alienation of many of his followers who had fled to swell Ndlambe's troops. Manisi insists in the poem that Ngqika is the ordained heir to the Rharhabe throne and that Ndlambe's desire for power is ill-advised and unsupported by custom.

The poet is evidently greatly pained by this civil war, and wishes to represent both Ndlambe and Ngqika as venerable Xhosa chiefs, even if the former has exceeded his mandate: "Both these men, we honoured them,/ saying Lwaganda is speaking,/ Ndlambe on the other side is speaking". To do this, he places the blame squarely on Makana: "We saw, therefore, that this thing was caused by Makana,/ Who caused the king's children to meet head to head,/ By bringing Ngqika against Ndlambe without cause". Of course, as I have discussed, there was cause: Ngqika's own treacherous dealings with colonials, and the long history of animosity between Ndlambe (who had competed for Ngqika's position) and Ngqika (who had abducted Ndlambe's wife, Thuthula). These are shameful matters of a penetrating nature to which the poet is not prepared to admit in his explanation of the shameful battle. Once more, he wishes to present the episode as having had no genesis in undignified Xhosa behaviour.

He concludes, referring to the two chiefs:

And yet the counsellors who served them  
 Who were the armband warriors and the trusted councillors  
 Know how to mislead the people.  
 But we don't blame Ntsikana  
 We criticise Lwaganda<sup>12</sup>  
 For going out to call the English  
 And yet even Lwaganda, we don't criticise him  
 We just put him aside.  
 We put the case to this boy of Gwala<sup>13</sup>  
 For he said all the white soldiers would be swept away  
 And thrown into the sea  
 By misfortune and misunderstanding  
 The people of Phalo's country died ...  
 (Opland Collection: 710217.1)

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<sup>12</sup> Lwaganda refers to Ngqika.

<sup>13</sup> Gwala refers to Makana.

Like Nongqawuse's prophecy, yet to come in the timeline of events, but already recorded by Manisi in poetry, Makana's promise that the colonials would be swept into the sea was false. It is this lie in Makana's vision that Manisi rails against, implicitly returning us to the truth of Ntsikana's call for Xhosa unity and peaceful resistance and accommodation. Ngqika is very briefly criticised, and at the same time exonerated, for his appeal to colonials for assistance after the battle. For Manisi, it is the white colonials who are to blame for their own ensuing barbarous behaviour.

It is unlikely that Manisi would have produced the same version of events for a Xhosa audience. His apprehension of Xhosa histories was sophisticated and sensitive to the contexts and purposes to which versions of it were put in a country in which white leaders consistently distorted the record to demonstrate black barbarity. For the record and for his white listeners, the poet represents internecine Xhosa conflict as shameful and disgraceful, but not as shameful and disgraceful as he might have shown it to be. Shame in this version is attributable to the misleading prophecies of one man, whereas it might have been attributed to a long history of internal disgrace and conflict, as well as, worst of all, to the legacy of Ngqika's collusion with colonials.

The 'Nongqawuse' and the 'Amalinde' poems, like the 'Thuthula' poem that followed them (Opland Collection: 710217.2), deal with shame and disgrace by creating sealed environments in which the poet unfolds his people's embarrassing narratives – before they happened, Manisi insists, all was well in the land of the Xhosa. In none of the stories was this true. And in none of the histories was the culprit Manisi identifies in his version solely to blame for the ensuing disgrace. The poet's evasion of a historical complexity in which he was well versed, his defence of the chieftaincy and its incumbents, and his greater concern with identifying the ills wrought by colonial intrusion in Xhosa society, evidence his awareness of the value of his poems as testimonies that will be heard by white audiences, and that will endure on the record.

Whether conventional *izibongo* about Mathanzima or strange, narrative hybrids on shameful subjects, Manisi's fieldwork poems evidence the imprint of the scholar's interest. The narratives, for instance, would never have been created without Opland's intervention, and all of the poems are surrounded in their transcribed and published form by interview material and interpretive writing that insists on Opland's

concerns with improvisation. The poems are not, however, the limp products of academic manipulation, nor are they mere demonstrations to please and appease scholarly enquiry. Each performance evidences Manisi's efforts to address his academic listeners, and to create durable products for the record that will attract to himself, his poetic tradition and his Xhosa community the praise and attention of educated audiences. In concerning himself in all of his fieldwork poems with Xhosa disgrace, dispossession and indignity at the hands of white settlers, Manisi seeks from colonial descendants respect for his formidable talent and for that which is honourable in his society.

## Chapter Five

### Provocative Audiences: Manisi's Poetry in South African University Contexts

Praise poets intervene in public life under the authority of the conventions attached to their art. It is convention that authorises the rural imbongi to mediate between an established ruler and his public, and to name each party to the social contract in ways that assert their mutual duty. Under the same conventions that govern the rural imbongi's role as mediator and official name-giver, industrial praise poets of the 1980s personified trade unions as duty-bound representatives of their worker-publics. Although the established literary tradition of izibongo is identified primarily with the chieftdom, trade union praise poetry illustrates the form's capacity for powerful address and efficacy in the secular politics of urban environments.

Literary conventions operate as a web of mutually supporting and limiting agreements: if it is widely agreed according to one convention that the imbongi is licensed to speak uncomfortable truths, another convention empowers the audience to decide at each performance the extent to which the poet will be heard. This web of interlocking convention is pinned to the socio-political landscape. In Chapter Three, I argued that the political milieu can nullify conventions that remain supportable from the perspective of the performer and his audience: the introduction of punitive security legislation in Transkei, for instance, effectively silenced many iimbongi even though their publics continued to support literary intervention in the political arena. At Transkei's 'independence' celebrations, David Manisi's struggle with his disempowering political context and with his own conflicting political loyalties prevented him from laying full claim to the truth-telling and critical conventions of his literary form, even though he must have felt that his public would ratify a scathing attack on Mathanzima's relationship with Pretoria.

In his performances for university audiences, Manisi was perhaps freer than at any other time in his recorded career to pursue the licences and mandates of his form, and yet, ironically, the conventions that empowered him were alien to most of his uninitiated, English-speaking audiences and therefore ineffective. Expecting demonstrations of a 'native' form, most of Manisi's academic auditors had little sense during the poet's performances that they were being addressed as political agents in terms mandated by a powerful genre. Intending his poetry to perform some part of its political function in difficult, intercultural environments, rather than merely

demonstrating its styles and potentials, Manisi attempted to politicise his marginal speaking contexts and, with varying degrees of success, to imagine himself and his audiences as members of broader political communities with mutual obligations in the context of a shared national problematic. Because audience reception of the poet's meaning was often delayed until summaries or line-by-line translations into English could be provided, translation played a central political, and not merely educative, role in Opland and Manisi's academic procedure. This fact is not always acknowledged, however, in Opland's assessment of how he and Manisi made their project intelligible to audiences.

In 1977 Manisi performed at the Grahamstown Festival to provide an example of a Xhosa oral poet in action. The seminar in which he produced his poem was part of a series of lectures arranged by Opland on the subject of Xhosa literature. Manisi's contemporary, Melikaya Mbutuma, performed on the same occasion, and both poets' contributions were eloquently summarised in English by Chief Ncamashe. In 1979, Manisi became Traditional Artist in Residence at Rhodes University and composed *izibongo* at university ceremonies, departmental events and, ostensibly for educational purposes, before audiences of schoolchildren. Several of these performances were followed by discussion and summary in the style pioneered at the festival by Ncamashe, while poems produced at ceremonies stood alone in Xhosa, unfathomable to many of their listeners. Between 1982 and 1985, Manisi was employed by Rhodes University as a research officer. Alongside his research duties, Manisi continued to work with Opland and produced several poems for academic audiences in classroom, staffroom and conference contexts. The body of recorded poetry produced by Manisi between 1977 and 1985 reflects the poet's efforts to activate the conventions of his art form in unusual circumstances by elaborating the duties that bind poet and audience in common society and endeavour.

Framed by a style of presentation that focused on text as demonstration, and faced with challenging intercultural audiences that variously angered, perplexed, pleased or entirely failed to inspire him, Manisi's political agenda had little prospect of success in its performance contexts. Even where his audiences were Xhosa-speaking, the education framework that surrounded Manisi's poems had the effect of depoliticising in his listeners' imaginations the purpose of his words. This fact is evident from the nature of the questions – relating to meta-textual issues such as whether aspirant poets serve an apprenticeship period – that followed Manisi's

rousing appeals to Xhosa schoolchildren. In his efforts to make his poetry work according to convention in highly unconventional contexts, Manisi's academic address constitutes a provoked and provocative body of poetry that, ironically in that it encodes so vividly the challenges represented by its live audiences, speaks with greatest political force from the record.

In this chapter, I shall discuss the way in which Manisi characterises his audiences as political agents who are duty-bound to redress historical and contemporary injustice. I shall argue that Manisi strives to construct a model of the South African polity as one in which the fact of mutual interdependence and duty mandates equality and national unity. Yet, the poetry of this period reveals more acutely than ever before his unresolved struggle between the ideal of non-racial community and an exclusionary black nationalism. In terms of the latter impulse, Manisi entreats black audience members to reclaim their land and pride, and denounces bitterly the legacy of colonial violence from which his poetry cannot disentangle his white listeners. I shall argue that in his festival and ceremonial poetry, Manisi is provoked and challenged by the political complexity of his Grahamstown context and multicultural audiences. In trying to address and link the different groups represented by these mixed audiences, Manisi's anger at historical injustice threatens, and often overwhelms, his intended message of unity.

The poetry produced in active ceremonial contexts can be contrasted with that produced specifically for demonstration purposes, for instance in school and academic lectures. Lecture audiences were mostly racially homogenous, reflective of the segregated nature of South African education, and tempted Manisi into poems that are one-sided and uncomplicated in their political messages. His inspired address of Xhosa schoolchildren exhorts his listeners to educate themselves enthusiastically so that they can lead the Xhosa to political power. In front of white pupils and students, Manisi struggles to construct a coherent and politically trenchant message, resorting often to an uninspired articulation of his listeners' duty to their privileged founders. It was at gatherings of his academic colleagues, such as departmental Christmas parties, and the Durban conference of 1985, that Manisi's performances were perhaps most fascinating because of the intersections they reveal between the intensely personal and the broadly political. Like his ceremonial poems, Manisi's izibongo for colleagues are fraught texts that reveal the easy dissolution of his ideal of political unity. They also reveal, however, the poet's deep desire to participate in the opportunities of academic

community, to be considered an intellectual, and his sense of research and education as inherently political activities.

### **Convention and altered contexts**

Folklorists have produced several important studies of the ways in which storytellers adapt their art to new contexts and audiences. One of these, on which I have already drawn in this thesis, is Patrick Mullen's account of Ed Bell's transition from local, Texan tale-teller to national folk-festival star (1981). While Bell's adaptation to altered contexts of performance appears to have much in common with Manisi's accommodation of academic audiences, it in fact provides a useful example from which to differentiate Manisi's poetry. Mullen discusses the effect on Bell's repertoire and performance identity of his exposure to large, culturally diverse audiences and to new locations and frameworks for storytelling. In response to altered audience expectation, Bell began to refer in his stories to current, widely reported events that would register with national audiences. Festival contexts of performance formed Bell's new sense of himself as a star, and academic interest in his output increased his self-reflexive understanding of his art (1981: 276). Like Bell, Manisi moved from local contexts in which he enjoyed an established literary reputation, to festival and academic environments in which his audiences were differently constituted and, often, equipped with tools of literary analysis and expectations of performance unlike those of his home audiences.

Despite these similarities, Manisi's transition to academic contexts is different in two fundamental ways from Bell's move in the same direction. Unlike most of Manisi's new listeners, Bell's national audiences spoke the language and understood the conventions and functions of his stories. And unlike Manisi's poetry, Bell's art was not inherently political in its purpose or mode of address, so that changes to his repertoire reflect concern with what would entertain rather than with how to politicise his addressees. While Bell's stories unfolded in, and perhaps commented on, the moments in which they were performed, they were not designed by convention to intervene in the political lives of their receivers. Other than Manisi's difficulty in articulating a coherent and inclusive political ideal toward which he might propel his audiences, the greatest challenge the poet faced in academic contexts was conveying to his audiences the political and urgent character of his poetry. The nature of these



twin problems suggests why his academic address produced such a strange poetry, particularly when compared to examples of how other praise poets have adapted their rural forms to urban and national audiences.

Historically in rural Xhosa society, the successful imbongi derives his authority not from public appointment but from his audience's tacit approval of his talent and political vision. Public appreciation of izibongo rests on a deep foundation of shared associations, symbols, histories, language and social and political values, as well as on an audience's preference for a particular poet's style, creativity, linguistic dexterity and capacity to inspire in performance. While occasionally a poet produces an entirely obscure reference that excludes his listeners from its meaning, most rural audiences understand with considerable insight the special use of language mastered by the praise poet. This is because, as Opland explains, most members of rural Xhosa society, especially boys and men, recite their clan and personal praise poems while herding or at family ceremonies, with the result that praise poetry has been historically a widely accessible and entrenched literary form among the Xhosa (1983: 34-40). The specialist imbongi's home audiences judge him to be a gifted and explicitly political exponent of an art they all practice in its domestic forms. It is this foundation of informal public opinion and support that empowers the praise poet with his form's capacities and freedoms.

As we have seen, in communities that consent to and comprehend his form, the imbongi plays a variety of roles: he assesses the political scene, inspires pride in his community of listeners, influences public opinion, introduces leaders and reminds them of their obligations to their ancestors and publics, invokes moral norms, appeals to the ancestors, and characterises the present political community by recounting its histories and articulating its aspirations. The poet's role, as Opland has argued, is essentially political (1983: 68) and his means of influence is a rousing poetry that ignites his listeners' spirits and imaginations with pride in their society and with the desire to fulfil their civic duties. Although he is traditionally attached to a ruler, the imbongi is essentially a people's poet. It is this attachment to the people's cause that led Manisi to break with Mathanzima in the mid 1950s. That poets like Nelson Mabunu, who continued to laud Mathanzima in poetry of uncritical devotion, were created by the apartheid system, accounts for some of the scepticism towards the figure of the praise poet that grew up in urban centres and indeed among many rural Xhosa. Nevertheless, the importation of praise poetry into urban contexts suggests the

flexibility of the form, as well as the applicability of the imbongi's social and political functions to the secular and chief-rejecting city.

Archie Mafeje's article describing Chief Mtikrakra's visit to Cape Town in 1961, which I discussed in Chapter Three, provides us with a unique and invaluable account of black migrants' continued interest in the art of the imbongi during apartheid, despite the simultaneous decline of their support for chiefs. Most of those who attended the meetings of welcome and farewell marking Mtikrakra's tour came to show their disapproval of the institution of the chieftaincy which, they felt, had failed them and become anachronistic (Mafeje 1963: 88). Yet these hostile audiences responded warmly to the performances of the unnamed imbongi who accompanied Mtikrakra. At the chief's reception, the imbongi rose on several occasions to encourage and support members of the audience. When people became agitated about the tight control exerted over who could address the gathering, the poet called for his chief to "[r]efrain from giving ministers all the chance to speak,/ For they are going to preach, as they are wont to./ Be advised and give way before the Thembu burn one another" (92). After a rousing speech by a man who had abdicated from his chieftaincy, perceiving the institution to be in ruins, the poet again intervened to herald the speaker's ancestral roots (92). Unimpressed with Mtikrakra and with rural leadership generally, audience members nevertheless allowed the imbongi to perform his customary functions and to prevent the meetings from becoming overly fractious.

Mafeje's account provides us with an early indication of the dilemma in which praise poets would increasingly find themselves in relation to migrant Xhosa audiences. It also illustrates, however, that praise poetry as a form continued to have merit for urban audiences. According to Mafeje, the conservative Africans in attendance did not reject the historical chieftaincy, but rather its apartheid incarnations and incumbents. We can speculate that those more radical and disenchanting members of the audience, even though they rejected the chieftaincy completely, nevertheless cherished a sense of their historical literary traditions and were entertained by the poet's interventions. In welcoming Mtikrakra's imbongi, the audience was able to distinguish the poet from his chief, and granted him authority in his capacity as mediator. Praise poetry travelled successfully across the political divide between urban and rural spaces, but it should be remembered that this mobility was facilitated by the fact that urban Xhosa audiences comprehended praise poets in performance,

recognised their art form, and were embroiled in political exchanges in which praise poets easily found customary speaking positions.

In the 1980s trade union praise poetry reflected a new political community and was instrumental in forging a collective worker identity and constructing trade unions as agents of worker empowerment. Although stripped of ritual significance and adapted in content to suit its new context of political action, trade union praise poetry was given force by the long-established conventions of the *izibongo* genre. The poetry still mediated between two parties in their joint endeavour, and empowered, inspired and gave dignity to their audiences. And although these audiences were not homogenous in their constitution, they were made up of black South Africans, most of whom were familiar with the figure of the praise poet and with the style and function of his poetry. Praise poetry was also mobilised in the struggle context by poets like Mzwakhe Mbuli, although, as I have discussed, many such poets gave voice to the rhythms, naming function and disjunctive style of the form through an adapted English medium. As in the trade union context, black struggle audiences were familiar with the literary roots to which their poets were appealing.

In post-apartheid South Africa, praise poets have performed a nationalist poetry among audiences marked by significant cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. Xhosa *iimbongi* Zolani Mkiva and Sthembile Mlangeni performed *izibongo* at Mandela's presidential inauguration in 1994. Although Mlangeni's poem was entirely in Xhosa, Mkiva employed a code-switching device in acknowledgement of the challenge his linguistically diverse audiences represented to his performance (Jadedzweni 1999). For many audience members, the form and Xhosa words of both poems were comprehensible, inspiring and appropriate to the significant political moment. For others, excluded from the poems' meanings by linguistic and cultural barriers, the overtly political context of the poets' declamations framed the poetry as a show of African culture and power. What all members of the audience understood was that the praise poet was attached to a political context.

It is no coincidence that so many silenced *iimbongi* resumed their art following South Africa's transition to democracy: they had found new political space in which their essentially political art could act appropriately. The principal requirement of praise poetry as a form is that of a viable political context in which to function publicly as a tool of mediation. Despite the voluminous critical speculation of the 1980s about the potential of praise poetry to adapt to urban contexts, it is

unsurprising that the form has featured so prominently in the political life of the struggle era and, recently, of the democratic nation. The difficulty in Manisi's efforts to address academic audiences, at the same time that trade union and struggle iimbongi were operating successfully, lies in the *academic* circumstances of his performances, and in the conflicted nature of the poet's political vision. In university contexts, poems are objects of study that are assumed to address outside audiences. This was an expectation fostered by Opland and Manisi's style of presentation and their way of speaking about their joint endeavour as demonstration and education. That Manisi sought to perform his genre, rather than showcase it, in such impotent contexts, resulted in poems possessed of latent rather than active power. In addition to the immobilising effect of performance context, I shall show that Manisi's difficulty in seeing many of his audiences as anything other than descendants of "lipping Brits" paralyses much of his poetry from within.

### **Festival and ceremonial poetry: the challenge of characterising mixed audiences**

The Grahamstown Festival is an annual event in South Africa's cultural calendar that showcases an eclectic range of cultural products – mainstream, marginal, experimental, educative – in various languages, although most performers communicate in English with their predominantly English-speaking audiences. In 1977, the festival's organising committee asked Opland to arrange a series of lectures about Xhosa literature for the cultural education of festival audiences. One of the seminars was to focus on the Xhosa tradition of praise poetry, and Opland invited Mbutuma and Manisi to perform izibongo in their capacity as "prime exponents of the art of the Xhosa imbongi" (Opland 2005: 151). Opland recalls the lecture event in terms of its significance as a departure from his established research strategy:

Instead of going into the field to record poetry in the context of an interview with the poet or, better, on public occasions when the poet was unaware of my presence, I was bringing poets to me; for the first time I was to deliver a public lecture on Xhosa poetry with poets present to provide examples of what I was talking about, allowing me to foreground their art rather than grabbing the limelight for myself as an authoritative lecturer. (2005: 151-152)

While he understood the lecture event partly as a recording opportunity that would augment his archive of Xhosa poetry, Opland's remarks testify to his hope that in showcasing Mbutuma and Manisi's talent, their audience would be edified by intercultural encounter. But the limelight Opland cast on the poets was intended to illuminate vivid examples of his introductory discussion. Ncamashe's translation-summary of Mbutuma's performance revealed to the gathering that the poet had indeed exemplified his usual practice by focussing on Mathanzima as a bringer of problems. Mbutuma's poem is structured around an enigmatic narrative that recalls a dream he had recently had about Mathanzima and certain apartheid politicians. The poem elaborates one of Mbutuma's long-standing preoccupations – the perplexing problem of how to evaluate Mathanzima's character and leadership. In his eloquent summary, Ncamashe groups disparate elements of the izibongo into coherent categories of discussion. He expands on several aspects of Mbutuma's meaning to which the poet's references and images merely allude, and concludes that Mbutuma's poem warns Mathanzima against trying to exceed Sabatha's paramount power.

As Opland discusses, Ncamashe's interpretation of Mbutuma's poem evidences his store of cultural knowledge and intimacy with a form whose mode is enigma and allusion. Ncamashe mediates between Mbutuma's meaning and form of expression and the audience's need for coherence, explanation and translation. But like Mbutuma, Ncamashe has a particular sense of the purpose of izibongo in such contexts: as a showcase of allegiances, identities and politics that act properly in other locations. His concluding remark, intended to bridge Mbutuma and Manisi's performances, highlights his understanding that he is engaged in a display of art:

It will be noted that the two iimbongi are commonly Thembu, but they represent different chiefs who are in a sense in competition with one another, and each is a kind of representation of the philosophy, the ideas and so forth of his own paramount chief. This will be reflected in the other man's praise singing. (Opland 2005: 158)

Ncamashe anticipates the subject of Manisi's poetry in this way because he understands the performance dialogue as occurring between the two poets in the manner of a traditional praising contest with himself as arbiter and the only viable audience. Despite Ncamashe's framing introduction and the audience's consequent expectation of his performance, Manisi produced a poem that specifically addresses

Ncamashe as a valued chief, and the audience as descendants of the treacherous 1820 British settlers in whose monument the seminar took place.

The poem represents a pivotal moment in Manisi's career because it signals his intention to engage with his listeners. Dominated by anger and accusation, and conciliatory only in parts, it is concerned with the history linking black and white South Africans, poet and audience. The poet begins by dividing his audience into political communities:

Hail, Zilimbola!  
 Hail, Zilimbola!  
 Here's my chief of Gwali's place,  
 a handsome Tshawe,  
 hump-necked like a bull or buffalo.  
 Here's this Tshawe chief,  
 fair from afar like dangling bead necklets.  
 Hail, Zilimbola!  
 We greet you tribes of lisping Brits,  
 and those of the land of Rharhabe,  
 tribes of Phalo,  
 tribes of Tshiwo,  
 and all black people.  
 So then, we thank you, tribes of Lispers,  
 of Lispers, tribes of Nonibe at Ngqakayi.<sup>1</sup>  
 Today we're here,  
 for we've met at the festival of English tribes. (159)<sup>2</sup>

Zilimbola, which means 'Clay-foresaker', names Ncamashe with his traditional salutation and enacts one of the form's central functions: to acknowledge and hail attending dignitaries as convention demands. Having praised Ncamashe according to custom in terms of his ancestry, place of residence and physical presence, Manisi turns to his other listeners, characterising white audience members as "tribes of lisping Brits" and black participants as "tribes of Phalo, tribes of Tshiwo, and all black people". Manisi greets his audience, then, in terms of colonial and historical communities, which he constructs his listeners as representing. In his opening address, Manisi takes up his mediating role by interpolating the different sections of his audience, as he identifies them, into the conventional discourse of his form's concern

<sup>1</sup> "Tribes of Lispers" refer to English speakers, whose language sounds to the Xhosa like lisping. "Tribes of Nonibe", as the Introduction explains, refers to colonials and their white descendants.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for poems and extracts from poems refer to their location in Opland 2005.

with tribal descent. The poet also locates the two strands of his audience in the context of “the festival of English tribes”, praising the context of their physical gathering for the moment of unity it represents, yet at the same time, in light of the accusations to come, damning the event as a colonial legacy which cannot truly bring unity.

The English heritage represented by the audience and the event inspires Manisi’s bitter reference to history:

How I love Satan,  
for chiefs and nobles worship him;  
I love Satan,  
Ministers worship him.  
We thank you, settler tribes,  
for you entered bearing the Bible,  
and you said “Receive the tome  
and cast off lore and custom.”  
We took up the Bible and followed you,  
minister turned into soldier,  
he raised his musket and blasted his cannon.  
Rharhabe’s mountains resounded,  
dust arose, the land was aflame.  
Standing here I’m speaking nicely,  
I’m speaking sweetly to leaders,  
for the ragtag men and women have gathered,  
posh ladies and gents have gathered.  
I certainly do admire it:  
I see a black, I see a white.  
Their impulse to mix was hindered by difference,  
for Satan’s in charge,  
sparring as always with the Immanent Son of the Maker.  
I’m speaking sweetly beneath the Mountain of Sins,  
staring at Nojoli’s mountains,  
squat mountains of Rharhabe’s land.  
The day the Bible arrived  
it brought the lash with it,  
the people of Phalo were scattered;  
...  
Ngqika and Ndlambe went separate ways,  
Ndlambe sought help from his Gcaleka,  
Ngqika sought help from the lisping Brits.  
They clashed that day and men dropped dead,  
not whipped by cannon – annihilated!  
How I love the Mountain of Sins,  
for it graces the City of Saints,  
for their the blood of men was shed,  
the heroes of Rharhabe’s land fell there. (159-160)

In Chapter Six I discuss in detail how Manisi used the idea of the poet as a liar and the “I love Satan” trope to signal his difficulty in fulfilling his mandate to speak truth in contexts of overriding complexity. Here, the irony cloaking his protestations of love for Satan barely conceals his palpable bitterness: the leaders of the communities represented by his white audience members have, in Manisi’s view, advanced selfish and treacherous designs on the innocent. It is the English who receive special castigation for the foundational lie upon which they built their colonial domination: having brought the Bible and its promises of love and humanity, colonials betrayed their own message and waged a mutually degrading war of dispossession against Rharhabe’s land, represented in the poet’s eyes by the black section of his audience. Manisi checks himself, however, claiming to speak sweetly, to be willing to let his anger dissipate, because he does not wish to lose the fragile opportunity of the gathering. Yet immediately he asserts suspicion of the apparent unity he had wanted to praise: “for Satan’s in charge,/ sparring as always with the Immanent Son of the Maker”.

Manisi’s historical interlude links Satan’s rule to the violence and lies with which he asserts colonials appropriated Xhosa territory and caused the descendants of Rharhabe, those under Ngqika and Ndlambe, to turn against one another. The irony contained in Manisi’s claim to love the Mountain of Sins<sup>3</sup>, where Makana’s forces fell to brutal colonial retaliation in their failed attack on Grahamstown, emphasises the contrast between the names ‘Mountain of Sins’ and ‘City of Saints’. Grahamstown is known as the ‘City of Saints’ because of its many churches – given Manisi’s frequent association of colonial religion with evil, he uses the name as a bitter irony. ‘Mountain of Sins’ is the Xhosa name for a mountain known to Grahamstown’s white inhabitants as ‘Makana’s Kop’ – the distinction in emphasis is apparent and Manisi’s insistence on the Xhosa name implies accusation against that part of his audience he has identified as colonial descendants.

History, as Manisi tells it, offers little motivation to his black listeners to reconcile with their white counterparts, yet Manisi suddenly assumes a conciliatory attitude and takes up the imbongi’s role as restorer of equilibrium:

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<sup>3</sup> The Xhosa original, for which “Mountain of Sins” is a translation, is ‘Intab’ezono’. See Map, where the Xhosa name is given.



So then, I have nothing to say,  
 I say, men, let's shatter our weapons,  
 make ploughs to raise corn and maize,  
 come together and clasp hands,  
 for the Immanent's voice is calling.  
 No person's a person in isolation,  
 a person's a person by being with other people,  
 humanity's essence is being with people. (160)

Manisi calls his audience to an honest commitment to God's desire for unity and humanity among his followers. The idea is pragmatic in part: war divides and deflects attention from what is needed by the whole interdependent community. But Manisi's Christianity is based also on his commitment to *ubuntu*, a widespread African conception of individual humanity as depending on one's relationship to human community. In post-apartheid South Africa, the concept of '*ubuntu*' has been widely deployed as part of efforts to Africanise the country's guiding philosophies. Its vague application in political and legal discourse has been strongly criticised, however. Richard Wilson argues, for example, that *ubuntu* has been used to "sell a reconciliatory vision of human rights to black South Africans" but that "[u]buntu belies the claim that human rights would have no culturalist or ethnic dimensions" (2001: 13). Manisi's application of the term similarly appears to smooth over the differences between the South African communities he addresses. In his published poem entitled "Ubuntu", Manisi expresses the meaning of his topic in broad, Christian terms and in an emotive and lyrical style. In his festival poem, the poet's articulation of *ubuntu* presents his solution to the problem of black and white coexistence in South Africa. Yet the rhetoric of *ubuntu* struggles to stand up to the South African reality of political division and pervasive inhumanity.

The weakness of Manisi's recourse to *ubuntu* is evidenced by his bitter and protracted denunciation of "You tribes of the West" by which he reasserts division as the incontrovertible character of the South African polity:

I thank you, you tribes of the West,  
 for bringing us the Bible,  
 and for ramming it in with the musket,  
 but today let's clasp each other's hand,  
 for we stand on this land together.  
 Here are the villains,  
 heads above the waves,  
 tongues flickering

like a cobra in lust for a man's ox.  
 They're lusting after this land,  
 for this land's in trouble:  
 while the English embraced us,  
 while the Boers divided us,  
 while the French ignored us,  
 someone said, "These fools maintain  
 there's no truth in the threat  
 because they give Satan status."  
 You tribes from the West,  
 we took the Bible you brought,  
 you said all people are one, God doesn't discriminate.  
 How do we come to be set apart?  
 Can't we share the land with each other?  
 For we the oppressed are distressed,  
 but not the whites, oh no!  
 They stride freely about,  
 unafraid of unwanted attention,  
 not side-stepping questions about where they've come from,  
 but we stand starkly exposed,  
 we travel with pounding hearts.  
 I disappear! (160-161)

Manisi's frequent resort to irony and his habitual return to evidence of white treachery reveals his deeply conflicted feelings about his audience and the historical and contemporary communities it represents. Everywhere he perceives threats to the fragile possibility of unity: the chilling image of cobra-like villains with their flickering tongues suggests a pervasive yet unidentifiable evil, until Manisi enumerates the nations – English, Boer and French – who have given substance to the metaphor in his portrayal of history. The image of serpentine colonials who set their store in Satan shatters the conciliatory mood of the earlier words and leads Manisi to challenge his white listeners: if their ancestors brought the Word of God, which promises humanity and equality, how has segregation come about? As if to demonstrate how irrevocably separate black and white South Africans are, Manisi does not characterise himself as a mediator-representative of the joint community envisaged by his reference to *ubuntu*. Instead he includes himself throughout the poem in the black community that has been alienated by the ancestors of his white listeners.

In the City of Saints and its monument to settlers, Manisi charges his white listeners with their historical obligation to correct their ancestors' treachery. The poem ends with a bitter comparison between white people's mobility and freedom in

the land they have seized, and the fearful, restricted manner in which black South Africans are forced to travel. The reference to travel exemplifies starkly the inequality of which Manisi speaks throughout his poem, but it also comments on the capacities of the poet's form in such contexts of speech. As previous chapters have shown, praise poems commonly chart possession of territory and describe men's characters by detailing their subjects' travels through a landscape that is intimately and heroically portrayed. The travel trope is central to the genre because it connects community and identity to land. Manisi's festival poem shows the extent to which, in the poet's view, colonials appropriated the freedom of the land that is central to his genre. Black figures do not walk purposefully through the history Manisi relates – they are scattered by invasion, and now suffer the indignity of anxious travel in land that had once been theirs. It is white people who need not fear “questions about where they've come from”, a bitter truth to a poet who conventionally charts his subjects' proud origins.

Manisi's festival performance indicates his intention to address complex audiences with the full force of his form's critical capacities, although the poet exposes the contextual qualifications to his conventional freedoms by resorting to irony. The poem can be read as part of Manisi's project of revising the historical record. For all of its energy, however, Manisi's address is deeply conflicted. The spectre of history hovers over Manisi's few conciliatory words, and the bitter reality confronting contemporary black South Africans prevents Manisi from seeing his white audience as individuals distinct from their colonial ancestry. In his summary of Manisi's performance, Ncamashe reveals the poet's accusation of colonials and discusses his sense of the inequality that characterises South African society. But he concludes, as Manisi did not, on a positive and conciliatory note:

... his message is that whether we are black or white, we are all sons and daughters of God. This is our country. It is high time we recognised that no one nation, no one race in this country – since South Africa is a multiracial country – no one race can claim to be altogether independent of the other ... the fact of interdependence is basic to whatever we do.  
(In Opland 2005: 162)

Opland argues that Ncamashe understood the poem from the insider's perspective and was able to reconcile the oppositions and contrasts through which izibongo conventionally work (2005: 162-163). He remarks on the way in which

“Chief Ncamashe’s orator’s mind arranges the poem into coherent topics, assembling and grouping references scattered about the text” (2005: 162). This is how one ought to make sense of the fragmented form. Each interpretation of a praise poem asserts its own sense of what the text’s dominant message is. What Opland omits in his assessment of Ncamashe’s interpretation is Ncamashe’s sense of his purpose as an interpreter and mediator. Manisi does appeal to a vision of multiracial interdependence, but I have suggested that these conciliatory moments are overwhelmed by anger and accusation. The tension between the two attitudes registered in the poem is not resolved positively in the way that Ncamashe asserts. Poet and poem are ruffled, provoked by their audience and their monument context, but English-speaking audience members are not exposed by Ncamashe’s summary to Manisi’s unresolved anger with them.

In 1979, as Traditional Artist in Residence at Rhodes, Manisi performed at the ceremony celebrating the opening of the building that had been prepared to house the International Library of African Music (ILAM). Andrew Tracey, Director of ILAM and a prominent researcher in African music and dance, was present among a mixed audience of academics, well-wishers and invited chiefs. The acting paramount chief of the Rharhabe, Chief Lent Maqoma, and Ndlambe chief, D. M. Jongilanga, attended the opening as honoured dignitaries. Opland remarks that Manisi’s performance context on this occasion “was closer to that of [his] traditional performances than on any other occasion during his stay at the Institute” (2005: 176). Certainly, his performance was an integral part of proceedings, and its ceremonial value was evident to audience members, even if many could not understand Manisi’s words. Unlike his festival performance, the ILAM poem begins and ends positively, exhorting unity among South Africa’s “diverse flocks”. Andrew Tracey is praised as a “peerless writer on dancing” who “gathered together diverse flocks”, although the poet has actively to resist the urge to reject Tracey’s ‘tribe’: “We thank you, Western tribes,/ we actually wanted to call you foes ...”. Despite its opening reference to Tracey and to “this day of high hopes”, however, the bulk of the text addresses Maqoma and veers off into an account of the chief’s travels through territory and his hostile reception by white inhabitants of the landscape. The proud description of Maqoma as one “with black sticks kept safe in dung” and as “this precious chief of mine” who “dismounts and surveys the plains of his land” is deflated by Manisi’s reference to the disrespect with which ruffians and white men’s daughters treat him:

As he enters Fort Beaufort he's troubled,  
 expecting the ruffians to rough him up,  
 but they were put out by his royal blood,  
 they flicked dust from their clothes and turned their backs.  
 He asks for water from white men's daughters,  
 but white men's daughters know nothing of giving  
 and just fob him off with a half-jack.<sup>4</sup> (178)

The indignity caused by such treatment is quickly cast off, however, by Maqoma's continuing journey, in the course of which he rouses Xhosa people from their sleep and leads them forward defiantly. Manisi reminds his listeners:

So this is the chief who tends Sandile's<sup>5</sup> village,  
 pre-eminent village of Lwaganda's land,  
 whose sticks will be shattered  
 when we go to Table Mountain  
 to reclaim Rharhabe's land,  
 for it runs from the Fish to the Gamtoos.  
 We won that land with spear and assegai  
 clearing a space for Phalo's village,  
 so every nation streamed in:  
 the English came and ground their heels on us,  
 in came the Boers to treat us boorishly,  
 the French arrived and froze up on us,  
 then the Germans looked at us so sternly. (178-179)

The poem's central concern is with Maqoma's significance as a liberating presence among Xhosa people. The sentiment is unambiguously defiant, excited about the time when Maqoma's followers will regain the territory taken from them by colonials. This central section of Manisi's address is motivated by Maqoma's presence, but has nothing to do with the purpose of the gathering. In fact, the pull exerted by the poem's centre of gravity appropriates a moment in the ceremony, enabling Manisi to deliver his subversive message to Xhosa audience members who understand him.

Manisi bridges his message of resistance and his return to the ceremony at hand by addressing Maqoma in these words:

So then, son of a chief,  
 I praise not you but the ceremony,

<sup>4</sup> A 'half-jack' is a South African term for a bottle of spirits (approximately 340 ml). Manisi's reference in these lines is to the way in which many whites stereotyped black men as alcoholics.

<sup>5</sup> Sandile was Ngqika's son.

for the ceremony is all people's:  
it's not a feast for Rharhabe alone. (179)

It is true, as Manisi's opening greeting of his audience shows, that the ceremony represents racial unity. The concluding lines of the poem express the poet's gratitude to the "lovely tribes" before him for embracing different groups, and exhort his listeners to welcome still more of "South Africa's nations" so that "we speak with one voice as one nation". However, the opening and concluding sentiments of the poem are not the true focus of Manisi's performance. He is disingenuous when he contends that he praises the ceremony rather than Maqoma, since the bulk of the poem is devoted not at all to the ceremony, but to Xhosa right as represented by Maqoma. Manisi makes his performance work as if it were two distinct poems, the one inserted in the middle of the other like a secret message to those who will understand his meaning. The surrounding poem acts like cladding and shields the multiracial ceremony from Manisi's exhortation to chiefs to assert Xhosa right against descendants of Western tribes. As a whole, the ILAM performance lacks the anger of the festival poem, but in its unconnected parts and bridging, it reveals an equal degree of difficulty in reconciling Manisi's desire for Xhosa ascendancy with his vision of a united South Africa.

A similar split, although much more bitterly expressed, appears in Manisi's performance at a ceremony in 1982 celebrating the opening of Afrocrafts, an arts and crafts centre established by Mercia Willsworth (an associate of ISER) as a self-help project for black township women. On display at the event were items such as beadwork and pottery that had been made by the Xhosa women who were present. Although Manisi mistook Willsworth for Alta Brink, the wife of South African novelist Andre Brink, his characterisation of her rests on her relationship with the black women she helps, so that the error does not affect the poet's general message. From its start, the performance expresses suspicion about white offers of help, recalling historical evidence of white betrayal:

I love Satan for he's worshipped by ministers,  
I love Satan for he's worshipped by whites.  
Oh the whites who speak in contradictions,  
they help with one hand and kill with the other;  
they got tied up in knots when they brought the Bible  
to the filthy tramps of Xhosa's land;

but oh the white man's a traitor,  
hiding a musket in his armpit. (224)

Manisi moves on to thank Willsworth for "gathering us on this dark neckjoint of a night", and describes her as a woman whose "deeds are white as the shining moon/ which rises over the sea shore" (224).

But praise quickly yields to renewed warnings that deception stalks the ceremony:

Trip, trap, Satan slips secretly off  
And Fatlips would rejoice,  
Laughing with a mouth full of flesh  
While others laugh with a mouth full of teeth. (225)

Expressions of gratitude for Willsworth's projects are challenged by Manisi's history of the destruction and lost traditions represented by the beads on display:

We thank you, woman of Brink's place,  
we thank you for the projects you've displayed;  
we thank you in seeing the beads of this land  
which vanished and drifted downstream  
when men lay stark on the field of battle  
and their families were scattered;  
for the beads were made by the ladies,  
fashioning them to decorate men  
so they looked smart in dancing,  
so they could stretch and flex,  
for this land was theirs.  
The Intruder came bearing a cannon  
and wiped clean the slopes of this land,  
and men were scythed down,  
and women left exposed,  
for the kingship was done. (225)

Beads were not meant for this kind of display; they were designed for use in Xhosa society as markers of beauty and love, and as evidence of cultural self-possession. The removal of Xhosa beads to commercial contexts fossilises them and reminds Manisi of a way of life that has been destroyed by the violent intrusion of white people. The closing lines of the performance appear to return to praise, and to encourage "the bones of this country" to tremble "until each bone links with another", but the image is fatally undermined by the poet's negative characterisation of the deeds he seems to

praise. Of Willsworth he concludes: "She's a beauty firmly established,/ with beauty like the River Snake,/ with beauty that stuns mankind,/ for beauty sets men in contention" (225). Nothing is as it seems to be, and the poet's expressions of praise conceal profound criticism. For a second time in ceremonial contexts, the unity envisioned by Manisi cannot withstand his account of history. The mixed audiences present at the Grahamstown festival and at the ILAM and Afrocrafts ceremonies provoked Manisi with their deceitful appearance of unity – an appearance he wishes had substance, but in which he cannot invest faith given his conviction that divisive and ineradicable histories stain his addressees.

**Pupils and scholars: the possibilities and constraints represented by homogenous audiences.**

In 1979, Manisi performed for three audiences of schoolchildren. Two groups were comprised of Xhosa-speakers and one of English-speaking boys from St Andrews, a private school. In addressing Xhosa school pupils, Manisi enthusiastically reminded his listeners of their district chiefs and identified them as children of the land of Rharhabe and of important Xhosa leaders. Both poems focus on the value of education as the proper tool of black liberation and urge black pupils to sharpen their minds with learning so that they may lead the Xhosa nation to freedom and ascendancy. In the first of the two poems, for pupils of the Samuel Ntsika Secondary School, Manisi sets the sights of his audience on the vast plains of the African continent, before he narrows their focus by returning to the eastern Cape where they live and where the first effects of their educated leadership must be felt. The whole African land he describes must be protected, he urges the pupils, from Western nations:

So now we'll be looking to you,  
future national leaders,  
to watch over Phalo's land,  
to watch over it down to the Cape,  
to watch over it to the Zambezi,  
to watch over it up to the north,  
Awuwa's land and Shangana's,  
for we are the African family.

Actually, we're only a southern cluster,



and in the south we're confined to the east,  
 yet oh, this Africa's vast,  
 its plains far-flung:  
 you'll have to track them down.  
 So set your sights and take root in learning,  
 for no country's ever won by fools. (190)

He goes on to entreat his listeners to eschew weapons of violence, and to justify their work of seizing Africa by asserting: "Back then our fathers held this Africa,/ and today we're simply reclaiming it" (191). What concerns Manisi particularly is that these future leaders should act in a dignified and justified manner. A war of violence is for the poet a degrading activity. He appeals to his audience to "make your minds a home for the stars,/ where the blazing sun illumines the moon,/ so we hold this land once more" (191). Similarly, he exhorts them: "Don't gulp your food down greedily,/ as if we were ragmen or firebrands:/ let's be a people fit for a nation" (191).

In his poem for the second set of Xhosa pupils, from Nathaniel Nyaluza High School, Manisi makes extended reference in highly equivocal terms to the achievements of Grahamstown's white population. He refers to the legacy of education among whites as the reason why Grahamstown has "grow[n] as a city far greater/ than the township where black people live" (197). But the poet is quick to expand on the treacherous way in which white inhabitants achieved their foothold in land that belongs properly to the Xhosa. He goes on:

So today we tell you the time is at hand  
 To seize your weapons, men,  
 To take the path we have to travel,  
 Which will yield us that power  
 Other nations have claimed,  
 Above all the English nation,  
 Which raped the land of Phalo and Tshiwo. (198)

Naming his listeners in terms of their ancestors and their present district chiefs, Manisi entreats the pupils to take up arms and liberate their land from foreign ownership, but it is quickly made clear that the arms to which the poet refers are those of education, which produces "clear-headed" leadership and a dignified, "well-ordered" nation (198).

Both poems for Xhosa school pupils centre, appropriately enough considering the present occupation of their audiences, around the value of education. But

education is portrayed as a political weapon for use in the war to come, when Xhosa people will regain the land they lost to colonial violence. Manisi is vehement in his attack on "Western tribes", particularly, as usual, on the English, whom he represents in the second of the performances as rapists. There is militancy in his characterisation of history and in his assertions of Xhosa right, and the idea of a multiracial, unified South Africa is nowhere considered. The poems are intended for a homogenous Xhosa reception and suggest nothing of Manisi's struggles in other contexts to accommodate more complex South African communities. But while a radical, Africanist note sounds in both poems, Manisi's proposal that education offers the solution to the country and the continent's problems renders his message moderate and, in the national context of armed struggle then well under way, ineffectual and unrealistic.

Before homogenous white audiences Manisi displays a similar one-sidedness of approach, although in several of these performances he reveals considerably less enthusiasm than he had shown in addressing the Xhosa pupils. At St Andrews, a private school that enrolled Indian pupils and was to admit black pupils the following year, Manisi faced an audience of white males whom he addressed in terms of their English heritage of learning. He lists the accomplishments of their founders and lauds the school's choice of a saint for its name and focus. Manisi mentions no hint of criticism, and no reference to frontier clashes. Instead he urges his listeners to continue upon their path and to become future leaders who "gather together diverse flocks,/ ... so we form a ball of scrapings" (185). Opland describes the performance as flat and the occasion as "somewhat stiff": "Although our aim was to present an aspect of black culture to a white audience, most of the audience ... were not ready to accept or respect black culture ..." (185). It is likely that Manisi was uninspired by his context and saw little scope for serious political address among white schoolboys. His approach is curiously acquiescent, however, and suggests the temptation of mere demonstration in uninspiring contexts.

Manisi gave a similar performance on the evening of the 12 June at the Albany Museum, before a disappointingly small audience of eight members of the public. Manisi praises his listeners for their happiness, reminds them of their blessings as the kin of English monarchs, and recalls their duty to their founder, Rhodes, whom he characterises as a "genius", a "patron" and a "visionary". The only hint of resistance

to such sentiments comes in the middle of the poem when Manisi lapses into a lamentation that hints at, but does not actually assert, Xhosa loss:

Oh the Xhosa, who prized the verdant plains!  
 Oh the Xhosa, who prized the streams and rivers!  
 Oh the Xhosa, who prized both valley and scrub!  
 Oh along came the whites, they came indeed,  
 and surveyed the lush land. (195)

The reference is mild: Manisi stops at the image of whites surveying the lush land and does not proceed to detail their violent conquest of Xhosa territory.

Whereas Manisi's flat and uncommonly acquiescent performances for the two white audiences discussed above can be explained in terms of his lack of inspiration and real interest in the possibilities of the two contexts, in his performance before a class of Divinity students he is evidently energised and enthusiastic. It is in this poem that the contradiction at the heart of Manisi's relationship with white audiences is most clearly exposed. He greets his audience as "assemblies of the Word of God" and as "sons of dignified men" by whom he means in this instance, "the respectable men of the West", "the Englishmen,/ the ones who sprightly crossed the sea carrying the bible,/ while under their cassocks they concealed the musket" (Opland Collection: 830901). The reference to the musket remains unexplored, for Manisi's purpose is to laud the activities of the missionaries "[w]ho tried their best, but this Africa's hard,/ she refuses to yield to the call". He names particular missionaries, including the first to enter Xhosa territory, Van der Kemp, and Stewart who founded Lovedale. Manisi lists several illustrious Xhosa graduates of the missionary school that he himself had attended until his expulsion, and characterises Lovedale as:

The great homestead founded by Scotsmen,  
 the men who brought the dawn of light;  
 because before the latter there came  
 the sons of Bennie and Ross<sup>6</sup>  
 who awakened the eyes of this Africa. (Opland Collection: 830901)

Manisi urges his listeners to take up the weapon of the Word of God and to emulate

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<sup>6</sup> Bennie and Ross were missionaries at Lovedale.

those fearless devoted men,  
 who left their country and came to Africa,  
 really keen to spread good tidings,  
 so that even the deaf and the blind,  
 might have their brains enlightened.  
 (Opland Collection: 830901)

The final moments of the performance encourage the Divinity students to uplift Africa by clearing out the darkness of racism and replacing it with the light of unity “because we are the children of one God”.

Compared to the many poems in which he lashes out at missionaries by linking them to Satan and violent colonial endeavour, Manisi’s Divinity performance is extraordinary. Its account of missionary activity in Africa not only characterises missionaries sympathetically, it also portrays Africa as having been stubborn and unrelenting in its reception of the missionary message. In most of his other poems, Manisi represents Africans as having been no match for the weapons of colonials, among whom he usually includes missionaries, and as having been scattered into weak disunity and trampled upon. It is not that in his Divinity poem Manisi criticises Africa for its stubbornness – indeed, there are traces of pride in Manisi’s assertion that “this Africa is thick,/ and she stands firm in her beliefs”. Manisi supports African tradition, and yet he exhorts his listeners to persevere: “But O, this Africa is thick,/ she needs to be scrupulously worked”. Africa’s thickness in the first reference suggests the forests of safekeeping mentioned in other performances and implies the solidity of African traditions and unity, but in the second reference, Africa’s thickness keeps out the light of God’s Word and must be overcome. The poem evidences the deep split in Manisi’s psyche in relation to Christianity and education: although in many contexts his profound anger at missionary incursion in Africa surfaces to support his revisionist sense of African history, as a committed Christian, he sees the products of missionary teaching as desirable, and recalls his own encounter with several missionaries at Lovedale as having been rewarding. The poem exhorts its listeners to adhere to the Word of God and to follow their predecessors’ example of bravery and tenacity in order to secure non-racial unity. Nevertheless, that Manisi uses the colonial trope of light and darkness to link the possibility of achieving unity with the legacy of missionary Christianity, suggests the extent to which the poem acquiesces to its audience and to that part of the poet that seeks to accommodate a vision of unity by supporting uncritically the original missionary project.

Of his poems for homogenous white audiences in lecture contexts, there is one that evidences irritation rather than acquiescence. In June 1983, Manisi addressed the Grahamstown chapter of the Soroptimists, an international organisation of professional women aimed at improving women's lives. The poem begins by praising Opland as one who moves through the landscape gathering important knowledge. But it goes on to challenge its audience of "white ladies" to follow Opland's example:

I then charge you at this stage,  
To lean upon your walking sticks  
And cross the stream to expose yourselves  
On top of that Mountain of Sins,  
And attentively look at the black people  
Who live in uncongenial dark houses.  
That is where the ashy pale ones of Phalo are,  
There you will hear then this mysterious language,  
The language of the morally strict ones,  
As moral discipline was maintained in Phalo's land,  
But was destroyed by the arrival of foreigners,  
And that is why we are today disregarded things,  
As we are looked down on with our children.  
(Opland Collection: 830609)

Manisi insists on another, impoverished reality on the side of the river to which the white women of Grahamstown never cross. The poem is an exhortation to these women to take up the knowledge of Xhosa culture that Opland brings them by recognising what the comfort of their lives conceal and support. Comparing the Soroptimists to the daughters of Judea, who gave up the comfort of their sleep to attend Christ's grave faithfully, Manisi urges his audience to cross over "to see on the other side of the stream/ whether the people there are well and healthy". The challenge goes to the heart of the women's professed Christianity and obliges them to the dutiful example of their biblical counterparts. The poem is astute and reveals a resilient resistance on the part of its poet that is nowhere apparent in Manisi's poems for white audiences in lecture contexts.

I suggest that Manisi's audience provoked him on this occasion because it was comprised exclusively of women. His other white audiences had been predominantly male. Manisi's patriarchal attitudes are apparent in many of his poems: in his farewell address of his Rhodes colleagues in 1979, he asks leave to return to his home where "many things need my presence,/ waiting for me as a man of that country, a man

among men". In the first poem in which he praises Opland, he expresses surprise that Opland should mix with Xhosa women (Opland 2005: 170). And in his response to a Xhosa school pupil in which he explains how he came by his knowledge of important historical facts he concludes, "I don't mix with women, I mix with men" (200). The masculine ethos of Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho praise poetry is well known, and Manisi certainly carried the idea that public and political matters properly concern men into the attitudes of his everyday life. Manisi's recognition and resistance of the ways in which apartheid threatened black male identity only served to heighten his assertion of his masculinity. Apartheid negatively affected black masculinity in that it elevated white men and women above a homogenised black mass, and emasculated black men both in their self-perception<sup>7</sup> and in the perception of black women. The Soroptimists provoked Manisi because they were privileged white women.

### **Addressing academic colleagues: the individual and the group**

On several occasions in front of lecture audiences, Manisi elected to praise and discuss Opland as a tenacious researcher among Xhosa and other African communities. We have seen how Manisi used Opland's example to demand that the Soroptimists take notice of their black neighbours. Earlier poems do not explicitly link Opland's work to the duties Manisi feels his audiences owe their countrymen. Because the poems focus exclusively on the one individual in academic contexts to whom Manisi was really connected, they express encouragement and approval of right behaviour, rather than focusing on historical injustices. Unlike the St Andrews and Divinity class poems, Manisi's izibongo for Opland do not compromise the poet's politics. Rather, they indicate their form's capacity for appreciating individuality. In his first izibongo as Traditional Artist in Residence in 1979, Manisi faced an audience from the Anthropological Society. In seeking to make his poetry work in such a context, his choice of Opland as a subject for his izibongo is particularly appropriate since he knew Opland would understand his poem in its performance. The poem praises Opland for being "an indefatigable searcher" and for visiting Xhosa people in their homes. Manisi describes Opland as one who gathers diverse flocks, although it

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<sup>7</sup> Bloke Modisane's autobiography, *Blame Me on History* (1963), is perhaps the most important statement of this emasculation. Discussing his obedience to discriminatory apartheid laws, for example, Modisane claims: "... because I had arranged myself under the will of the law I permitted other men – armed by the letter of the law and under the protection of the law – to castrate me" (1963: 124).

seems that the place in which Opland gathers nations is in the pages of books – Manisi makes it clear that the Xhosa are not aware of Opland's efforts and that the principle value of the scholar's work lies in the legacy it constructs: he "ransacks every stream,/ forming piles on the banks as a future legacy" (Opland 2005: 170).

Although Opland is described as "a sturdy book of the whites", the poem implicitly forgives its subject his association with white research because of his commitment to Xhosa custom. In fact, it seems to Manisi that Opland wishes he were Xhosa himself:

You gather the Xhosa, you raise and you shape them:  
Would you ever be Xhosa yourself?  
You make your case, enliven tradition,  
you excel at speaking of custom:  
Would you ever be Xhosa yourself? (171)

The poem ends with an exhortation to Opland to stay in his position, to remain committed to his work as an example of how people ought to live in a multicultural society: "I wish nations would lick each others' wounds,/ stop facing each other distrustful and hate-filled" (Opland 2005: 171). The reference revives a stanza from Manisi's 1952 poem on the subject of *ubuntu*. It is because of his unreserved approval of Opland's example that Manisi's assertion of *ubuntu* stands as the poem's message to its audience.

In 1982, in another lecture context in East London, Manisi again chose Opland as the subject for his performance. The opening of the poem demonstrates the poet's appropriation of the scholar as a subject, by its provision of names for Opland that follow the patterns of convention:

Mumbler while eating,  
Puff adder with a reputation,  
Peerless sage among whites,  
Storehouse of knowledge,  
Handsome short-horn,  
The tough sturdy son of Opland. (226)

The names echo those used by Manisi to describe chiefs, and the relation they bear to established, conventional praises asserts Opland's worthiness as a subject of poetry. As he did in his 1979 poem, Manisi encourages Opland to hold to his "perilous path"

so that nations may follow his lead and unite in common projects. It is the poet's singularity of focus on Opland that enables him to craft poems that unreservedly champion the prospect of unity between black people and the white community of which Opland is a member.

Reference to Opland did not always have such benign effects. At a Christmas celebration in 1982, in Opland's house, Manisi produced a darkly ambiguous poem that praises Opland briefly yet surrounds praise with barely concealed accusation. The poem's introduction suggests its overall tenor:

When the clouds move and broaden,  
and the stars densely scatter behind the clouds,  
and beyond the clouds the stars brightly shine,  
indicating the state of change or somersault,  
you Nonibe's crowds, wise and clever fellows,  
you mark your steps and leave everything in pleasure. (229)

Images of concealment and a focus on the distinction between appearance and reality structure the poem's address of its academic audience. Opland is praised for gathering together "these dignitaries and fine ladies", but the surface geniality of the gathering does not guarantee its true character:

By the way you have brought together unlevelled men and women,  
whose inmost feelings cannot be detected,  
as if they are plunged in the crocodile's deep pool.

...

We thank you, you crowds of Nonibe of Ngqakayi,  
you fellows who were given milk cows  
to milk and feed your families,  
but you pulled the trigger of the musket  
to grab the stock and snatch the land,  
impelled by fixed desire to seize someone's property,  
you generation of wiliness and guile.

Oh! Such are the malicious tricks of this race. (230)

Hidden beneath their outward appearance, according to Manisi, the gathering conceals terrible greed, exemplified by the history of which they are the beneficiaries. Manisi's sense that colonials and their descendants had sufficient to ensure their families' comfort before they plundered the land and stock of others is a particularly bitter indictment. In what follows, Manisi explains that "the praise singer finds fault with



you,/ because praise singers are such fellows,/ who it is easy to find fault with other men's garments ..." (230). With these words the poet asserts the customary operation of his form: as a praise poet, he is charged with the work of alerting his audience to their faults.

The truth, as Manisi identifies it, and despite the Christmas context of his poem, lies in his listeners' colonial heritage. The poem reverts to Manisi's established concerns with how missionaries duped Xhosa leaders into accepting the Bible, and then betrayed them with violent attack against their communities and land. Manisi concludes:

We thank you, you crowds,  
that we loathe one another to be friends.  
O, how attractive are the people sitting in orderliness,  
attentively, comfortably, dignified in tranquillity;  
the appreciative step you have shown  
is recorded beyond the dark clouds.  
O, how joyful it is to talk,  
but O, how hard it is to act,  
but most disgraceful is buying the truth,  
and all of a sudden selling it out. (231)

The contradiction contained in the idea of loathing as a basis for friendship is echoed in the assertion that the audience's "appreciative step" is hidden and inefficacious behind a thick screen of ominous cloud. More is required, he implies, than a step – his audience is entreated to act on the agreeable words they speak and to show fidelity to the truth.

Manisi did not always register suspicion of his colleagues, however. At the end of his time as Traditional Artist in Residence in 1979, he performed a poem expressing sincere gratitude to his academic friends, whom he characterised as "free-handed people" and "pure-hearted people/ who drive Satan out and cast him aside,/ and raise the Eternal to store in their hearts" (203). And at a 1983 Christmas party attended by his colleagues, Manisi marked the resignation of a valued member of the faculty by identifying himself with the university:

... today you leave us.  
Go then,  
for wherever you go there'll be people  
and you will give them help.

Be of service on our behalf  
and you'll be of service to Cecil's home.<sup>8</sup> (240)

In that year too, as I discussed in the first chapter, Manisi wrote a poem for newspaper publication commemorating the death of the Xhosa academic, Qangule, which he signed as an employee of Rhodes University. Unlike many of his poems for mixed audiences in which he identifies himself exclusively with black communities, these few izibongo register the poet's desire to belong to the academic community. But there is no question that his feelings about his academic colleagues, the university and their location in Grahamstown were fraught. Shortly after his 1979 poem of gratitude and farewell, for example, he wrote and sent to Opland the long and contorted poem about Rhodes University that I discussed at the end of Chapter Two. In it, he tries to reconcile colonial histories with his experience of the university named for one such colonial. His purpose is to encourage those who work at Rhodes to open the university to all the peoples of South Africa and to work against the ugly past represented by their institution. Yet, despite the positive message that intersperses the poem, episodes recounting violent conflict weigh heavily. Their frequent recurrence in the text is evidence of Manisi's irreconcilable heart.

It was at the 1985 conference on oral tradition and literacy (held at the University of Natal in Durban) that Manisi demonstrated most vividly both the paralysis that could attack, from within, his address of academic contexts, as well as the force with which he could insist, against the restraints of the same contexts, on his authority as an active imbongi. As part of an evening of performance on which two Zulu praise poets recited memorised poems, Manisi followed Opland's introduction of the improvisatory art of the Xhosa imbongi with an izibongo addressing his fellow conference delegates. The poem, although it characterises its audience as descendants of villainous colonials, commands its oppositions in a way that Manisi had not often managed before academic audiences. He greets his listeners as the "lovely cream" whose "brains glitter with stars and moon" but who overreach themselves in seeking to "grasp the sun" and are left "trembling to their roots" (Opland 2005: 249). In his second characterisation of his colleagues, he invokes their historical context as

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<sup>8</sup> "Cecil" is a reference to Cecil John Rhodes, for whom Rhodes University is named.

sons of heroes of old,  
 who held no fear of death,  
 who crossed the sea braced with cannon and musket,  
 who bounded over the ocean.  
 They entered and forced the abortion of Africa:  
 when they met in battle  
 warriors dropped on both sides,  
 the white man's muskets  
 mowed down the African and left him to rot! (250)

The accusation that colonials caused Africa's abortion is a powerful indictment, as is the image of Africans left to rot by the callous unconcern of those who mowed them down.

Yet, the narrative intervention is not as one-sided in its characterisation of colonials as many of Manisi's previous performances attacking academics had been. Although they brought and used weapons of devastating violence, colonials were also brave adventurers, heroes to some, and they too lost men when "warriors dropped on both sides". At the end of the poem Manisi adds:

We Xhosa are ever grateful  
 that men like Ross and Bennie  
 came to ignite the mind of the Xhosa  
 by first transcribing the language,  
 the peerless language of the Xhosa. (250)

Although colonials caused destruction, they also gave literacy to the Xhosa and literate shape to their language, gifts of considerable value to a writing poet such as Manisi. Although his image of missionaries as igniters of benighted minds repeats colonial discourse uncritically, Manisi's reference to Bennie and Ross as individuals, tempers his allegations against colonials in general. In this way, the poet's criticisms stand, but they are given nuance by Manisi's recognition of a more complicated truth.

The poem also expresses gratitude to its listeners for their efforts to understand the "lore and language of nations" and for "including legends of blacks". Manisi encourages his audience to examine still more African languages, however, and to "stop splitting hairs over trivial folklores,/ split hairs on the birth of language itself" (250). Overall, Manisi expresses approval of the conference proceedings, and holds his listeners to their duty to correct the injustices of their ancestors while recognising positive colonial imports and individuals. It is perhaps the one poem produced by

Manisi in academic contexts in which he maintains control over his arguments and emotions. In it, he illustrates dexterity in handling praise, criticism, exhortation and commentary to shape a constructive message in the voice of the poised and powerful praise poet.

In the question session following the performance, however, the poem buckles retrospectively under the strain of Manisi's easily aroused anger. Edgard Sienaert, a conference delegate, challenged the idea that Manisi improvised his poetry in performance by asserting that the poet had had ample time to think over what he might say to his audience and that this type of thinking was no different from actually writing down the words: "If you write it on paper, or you write it in your mind, or you think it in your mind, it's the same thing. So improvisation – we must know exactly what we are talking about" (251). The question was an academic one and demonstrates the centrality of the memorisation/improvisation debate at the time. Sienaert was Flemish in origin and spoke in an accent that was impenetrable to Manisi, but when Opland summarised the challenge, the poet immediately rose and responded in poetry that proved his capacity for improvisation. However, the terms in which Manisi proved his point were brutally destructive of the careful and judicious balance he had crafted in his main address:

You speak of the Xhosa and Zulu languages:  
 what the hell do you know of the Zulu and Xhosa?  
 Where do you come from? Mind your own business:  
 leave the Xhosa and Zulu alone  
 to tend to their Nguni languages,  
 for this country's a mess.  
 Once we were people,  
 but how great our distress  
 when those Western gents, your fathers, arrived!  
 They shattered and scattered us:  
 the English ground us underfoot,  
 The Boers blunted our horns,  
 the French were frosty,  
 and today the Germans gawk at us. (251)

Sienaert's question is not allowed the freedom of academic convention. Manisi characterises the challenge as a political intervention that recalls the indignities of colonial incursion.

The poet's retaliation is angry and unbalanced. In demanding that black communities be left alone to tend to their languages, Manisi also wishes that they would be left alone politically. The poem undoes the fragile bonds of connection established by the previous performance and suggests the ease with which his colleagues unwittingly provoke Manisi into anger and accusation. It is a significant failure of his genre, which is concerned with the minutely individual as well as the inherited markers of identity, that Manisi's address of his white audiences always collapses into historical generalisation. The poetic paralysis that results is a failure to adequately address the audience's capacities as individuals and their present identity as participants in apartheid South Africa.

It is in his final poem of the period I have been discussing in this chapter that Manisi identifies the other, immobilising force standing between himself and his academic audience. Closing the conference, Manisi addresses the gathering by identifying himself as a descendant of Xhosa leaders and as rooted in a landscape he loves. It is out of this authority that he addresses Albert Lord, who was present at the conference, as a go-between from America whom he charges with the task of representing Africa's plight to powerful American leaders. In the course of the poem, Manisi addresses his audience in a meta-discourse that rails against their inability to comprehend him and their failure to participate in the conventions of his poetic form:

You people present a problem to me:  
my language presents a problem  
to sages and experts;  
I might have appealed  
to you all to exclaim  
and greet the son of Lord  
saying "Hail, World-famous!" (252-253)

Conventionally, the poet leads his audience in saluting an honoured guest. The audience should repeat the signalled praise for Lord as they have been invited to do by the poet and by the conventions of his form, but Manisi's receivers do not understand his language of declamation, as the poetry itself acknowledges, nor do they understand themselves as participants in the poem.

What follows is a contest in which Manisi insists that his listeners move themselves from the periphery of his poem, where they have taken up positions as

learned observers, to its centre where they will learn and respond to its conventions like an audience in training. He continues:

White people present a problem to me,  
but so does dirty black horseshit.  
We give you a name, son of Lord,  
the Xhosa say "Hail, World-Famous!" (253)

Opland takes up the refrain, but Manisi is not content and demands: "Come on you guys: 'Hail, World-Famous!'" (253). At last his audience obeys the directive, and says the words drawn out of them by Manisi's expectant repetitions. The poem locates its poet in specific landscapes and communities, to which English-speakers and white academics are outsiders. And yet the poet is not content to allow his audience the comfort of its otherness; he insists they learn, even if only incompletely, how to be an audience fit for his performance.

The lesson Manisi teaches his audience is not merely educative; its function is not to demonstrate how a literary form works. The lesson learnt *enables* Manisi's poem to function. It is only when the audience recognises its responsibilities to Manisi's genre that the poet permits his performance to move forward. For once, he has overcome, at least partially, the immobilising effect of his conditions of speaking. But in moving beyond his initial concern with specific place and identity to refer to the unwieldy political entities known as America and South Africa, Manisi must again confront the problem of how to address complex intercultural audiences using the authorities of his poetry. In exhorting Lord to secure assistance from wealthy patrons abroad so that the destitute of South Africa might be saved from their predicament, Manisi sketches a global history of nations' selfish actions that grapples with the terms in which his poetry might secure obligation from foreign addressees. It is Manisi's constant struggle (and frequent failure) to form constructive relationships in his poetry with his academic addressees, both politically and in terms of convention and language, that threatens to immobilise his academic address and thwart his own ambitious efforts to act as a critical yet constructive poet of the nation.

## Chapter Six

### **The Poet as Liar: Indirection and Contradiction in Manisi's American Poetry, 1988**

In 1988, Manisi won funding from the Fulbright Foundation to visit American universities in his capacity as an expert exponent of the art of the Xhosa imbongi. Based at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, Manisi produced poems for several university courses, including Opland's lecture series on oral poetry, Robert De Maria's 'Transformations of the Word' classes, and Paul Russell's 'Politics of the Imagination' course. As well as performing for student audiences, Manisi gave a public performance at Vassar's Taylor Hall, and produced intimate, spontaneous poems on two occasions at private dinners. In addition to their Vassar engagements, Manisi and Opland toured American campuses, presenting their "lecture-demonstrations" at the universities of Columbia, Harvard, Berkeley (where Manisi also participated in the Old English Colloquium), Pennsylvania, New York, and Texas. Although Manisi was to have stayed at Vassar for six months, his wife's sudden death in childbirth abruptly ended his Fulbright term after four months, during which time he had addressed the most foreign audiences and, perhaps, the most complex political contexts of his career.

American universities responded with a mixture of eager anticipation, unease and open hostility to the prospect of hosting a black South African poet whose poetry and public career were associated with a 'homeland' chief. Several members of the English Department at Vassar had laboured enthusiastically to promote the poet to the Fulbright Foundation as an expert exponent, rather than a foremost scholar, of Xhosa oral poetry. The Foundation's Scholar-in-Residence award was conventionally designed to bring leading academics to American universities. Although the application on Manisi's behalf succeeded, the refusal of Vassar's Africana Studies Department to support the project perplexed and upset many of those who had been excited about the prospect of Manisi's visit. The political furore that would arise on the Vassar campus while Manisi was there owed much, Opland explains, to the attitudes of Moses Nkondo, a black South African in self-imposed exile in America who was employed jointly by Vassar's Africana Studies and English Departments. An active ANC member, Nkondo had reprimanded Opland for his public discussion of ethnic cleavages among South Africa's black population, and had decided before

meeting Manisi that the poet was a sell-out whose association with the discredited chieftaincy damaged the image of unified black resistance Nkondo wished to promote abroad (Opland 2005: 269- 271).

In 1988, when Manisi took up his Fulbright award, violent insurrection was raging through South Africa's townships and peri-urban areas, and in American universities, the subject of apartheid easily inflamed campus debate. Although the ANC had been banned in South Africa since 1960, many ANC leaders and activists had gone into exile in the United States and were a vocal presence on American campuses. Manisi found no reprieve as a visitor to the United States from the political complexity that had characterised and often disabled his performance contexts in South Africa. Some of his American listeners perceived Manisi as an accomplice in apartheid's scheme. Although the judgement against him passed by people like Nkondo attributed political agency to Manisi's public appearances, it was not the agency of his poetry or political message, but rather the passive agency of what Manisi appeared to represent, that attracted hostility.

For many of his American listeners, Manisi provided, in addition to what he represented politically, an exotic example of the tribal form about which they had gathered to learn a basic literary and anthropological appreciation. As had been the case in South Africa, American audiences expected to be edified culturally by attending ethnographic lectures and witnessing their exemplary performance texts. This expectation was encouraged by the way in which Opland and Manisi described and presented their joint product. In addition to those who spurned Manisi's performances for the retrograde politics they seemed to such viewers to represent and those who attended with interest, unaware of the direct political address aimed at them by the poet's foreign tongue, there were students who received seriously the poet's demand that Americans should provide education opportunities for impoverished Africans. But it is evident from the transcript of an interview conducted by students that they considered Manisi's message an ineffective and politically soft solution to the problem of injustice and escalating unrest in South Africa (In Opland 2005: 327-328).

In South African contexts, as we have seen, Manisi found many of his terms of address mired in historical and political binaries – a bind to which he frequently alludes in his poetry by referring to the colonial encounter and to his contemporary speaking conditions as moments of terrible trickery that force the poet to become a



liar. In the United States, Manisi's performance contexts were complicated by the American perception of apartheid and its agents, by the defensive attitudes of the ANC exile movement, and by the poet's sense that Pretoria's spies were monitoring his visit and might use his poetry against him when he tried to re-enter South Africa. He registered the difficulty of speaking to such circumstances by referring to himself increasingly in his izibongo as a compromised poet who must lie when he performs. The self-reflexivity of the American poetry extends a strategy that Manisi had deployed in many of his poems in South Africa – at Mathanzima's graduation and inauguration, and in university contexts in Grahamstown. Yet the acute and pervasive irony and indirection that characterises the American poetry merits special attention because it is contradicted by Manisi's efforts in the same poetry to represent, in direct language, a simplified pair of political communities between which he could posit a relationship of desperate need and corresponding duty.

The American poetry pursues a political purpose and is not, despite the many constraints on Manisi's freedom to speak truth, mere demonstration. In seeking American help with black education in South Africa, Manisi tries to hold audiences accountable for their failure to discharge their ancestral duties and moral and political obligations as he articulates them. But Manisi faced the problem that his foreign audiences knew nothing about the conventions of his form except for what they managed to absorb from Opland's introductory lectures. Manisi's strategy was thus to create a simplified version of the American duty to Africa that relied on the construction of equally simplified American and African communities. He portrayed the United States as a uniformly wealthy, autonomous and contented polity and contrasted it with a vision of Africa as a homogenous, powerless, desperate and dying continent. In identifying the United States, Manisi silenced his criticism of America's internal racism, which he had criticised at the 1985 conference on orality and literacy in Durban in his praise poem for Albert Lord. In order to portray Africa as a continent of unequivocal despair, Manisi constructed himself as Africa's representative: a destitute vagrant stripped of dignity and power, present among Westerners as an accusing embodiment of what they had neglected and reduced to beggary. Manisi's portrayal of himself as a representative African beggar was contradicted by his subterranean sense of his identity and land that kept breaking through the taut surface of his polemical poetry to reveal a pride and resilience that jeopardised the simple

contrast in power between Africa and America on which he intended to mount his appeal.

If Manisi chose a simple strategy with which to engage American sympathy, the contradictions that resulted from his one-sided representations combined with the political complexities of his performance contexts to produce poetry whose principal mode is indirection. In his American poems, Manisi claims to command many of the contradictions he identifies: by representing the poet as a liar, contra convention, he creates an ironic space in which he tries to alert audiences to the ubiquity of deceit that characterises his speaking contexts and that makes articulation of truth impossible. Irony allows Manisi to challenge the imperial content of terms associated with morality and religious faith, although the extent to which he asserts ownership over these terms is difficult to assess because of his uncritical reliance on missionary language and teachings, including the moral vocabulary of darkness and light, the virtue of endurance and the idea of inevitable salvation. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which what is said and what remains unsaid by Manisi's ironic references and expressions of indirection reflect the poet's efforts to guide his audiences' interpretation of his poetry in their difficult contexts of utterance. I also examine silences in Manisi's poetry and contradictions that escape the control of his strategy in appealing to foreign audiences. Despite the tenacity and energy of Manisi's American poetry, I shall argue that it was deeply compromised by the poet's efforts to effect connection between African and American polities through the agency of African begging and American guilt. If the Xhosa imbongi is to act successfully as a political mediator, the parties he represents to each other must have, in addition to their partisan interests and identities, a common cause and geography that can be invoked by the poet as forceful reasons why parties owe duties to each other.

### **The poet as an African**

I argued in the previous chapter that Manisi often allowed anger to pervade his address of academic audiences in South Africa, but his anger stemmed from his conviction that he and his listeners were morally, politically and geographically bound to each other: their shared history and national problematic created between them insoluble bonds of mutual obligation. In America, Manisi was an invited guest who appealed to his audiences to share their wealth and learning with the destitute of

Africa. The bond of obligation the poet posited between America and Africa was a broadly moral and political duty owed by America to the poor. Manisi argued that the nation of which his audiences were representative was excessively wealthy and that its selfish wealth created an imbalance in a world where, outside of the West to which America confines its concern, starvation, poverty and gross inequality cripple countries like South Africa. The difficulty for Manisi was that the American duty he identified could not be made reciprocal. In his conciliatory appeals to South African audiences, Manisi entreated his white listeners to share their wealth, learning and political power with their black countrymen, who would reciprocate with humanity and reconciliatory acceptance so that the national community could prosper in the land they shared. Even when the poet was overcome with fury towards his white audiences, he always conceded the geographical reality of cohabitation – white audiences were upbraided for having violated the reciprocity that *should* underpin the national context.

In the United States, however, Manisi was a stranger in a strange land. America and Africa shared neither landscape nor local political problematic, and it was not until Manisi returned to South Africa that his poetry hinted at the historical link between the two continents: the African American experience of injustice in a land to which African slaves had been brought. At the conference on orality and literacy in Durban in July 1985, Manisi had closed proceedings with a poem in which he appealed to Albert Lord to act as a go-between by representing Africa's plight to Americans on his return to his home country. Manisi referred to Lord as one who "carries black sticks,/ kept on Atlantic shores" who "came from America to join our thugs". But he was quick to remind his audience, and Lord particularly, that:

Of course there're thugs in America  
though no one makes much of it:  
their robes conceal  
America's racist trash,  
while South Africa's brand  
explodes like popcorn  
roasted on hearth embers. (253)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for poems and extracts from poems refer to their location in Opland 2005.

Manisi understood that racism was also an American problem, kept considerably quieter than "South Africa's brand".

Yet in his American poetry, Manisi makes no indictment against his predominantly white audiences for their treatment of African Americans. Perhaps he felt that they would receive his criticism angrily, as a foreigner's illegitimate intrusion into their domestic affairs. Since Manisi believed that he was under surveillance in America, it is also possible that he failed to link the civil rights movement in America to the black struggle in South Africa because he worried that the assertion would be excessively inflammatory as a matter of record. Instead of identifying American racism, Manisi addressed his audiences as members of a unified nation and confined his critique to the issue of America's material excesses. Privileging a vision of America based on the rhetoric wielded by its founders and leaders, Manisi addresses an audience at Columbia University in congratulatory terms:

ladies and gentlemen of Eisenhower's home,  
we doff our hats to you  
for gathering all in one embrace  
that expels unfairness and difference  
based on colour or bigotry. (302)

That Manisi failed to identify America as an internally divided and unjust polity, suggests his sense that he was an outsider and that some of the central conventions of his form, such as the right to identify and criticise his audience's moral and political failures with impunity, were inoperative in such contexts.

Manisi's American poetry reveals a persistent anxiety about how the conventions of his form would function in a foreign context. At a small dinner party hosted by Robert De Maria, Chairman of the Vassar English Department and principal author of the application which had won Manisi funding to visit America, the poet sets out the terms on which he is present in a foreign land: "you called me and I responded/ you summoned me and I've come" (273). He goes on:

Have you seen the thorny kraalwood,  
a brittle tree of Africa?  
Have you seen the lonely go-between,  
travelling from beneath the Drakensberg?  
Well, I come with no marks of rank,  
I've arrived unarmed,

I came at your invitation,  
 you grandson of a great man,  
 eminent among America's creatures.  
 What made you notice the unnoticed?  
 At home I'm not seen as important:  
 what shall I be in a foreign land? (273-274)

Manisi identifies himself in terms of the African landscape, specifically as a thorny tree, rooted in African soil and richly evocative of the silhouette of the Southern African veld. But his self-identification does not take the form of assertion. It is framed by questions that ask how his American addressees see him. The questions conceal, but hint at, Manisi's real concern: does his foreign audience understand the grounds on which he addresses them – not simply as a poet, but as an African who comes to them to arrange a marriage of duty? In a later poem, Manisi suggests that when he travels home, he will “tell tales in Africa/ of American customs and ways” (297), but what he comes to ask cannot properly be reciprocated in this small way. In reality, what links him to his interlocutors, Manisi acknowledges, is nothing more than courteous invitation. And the invitation does not stipulate the poet's African meaning for his audiences: what will he be in a foreign land?

A similar problem preoccupied Manisi in his first public performance at Vassar on 2 February for Taylor Hall's capacity crowd. His poem characterises its audience as being blessed with access to education and abundant opportunity. He praises the founder of his audience's college, Matthew Vassar, for his intellect, vision and personal dedication to the task of providing education for American men and women. He is a

man with deep pockets,  
 though his habit is not to eat on his own:  
 he'd eat with an eye out for others,  
 toss a scrap to the clothesless,  
 give a slice to the breadless. (291)

Manisi's purpose is to articulate his audience's duty to the legacy left by their institutional ancestor. In recognising Vassar's example of generosity, the poet implies, the audience acknowledges in addition to their duty to their countrymen a further duty: to others elsewhere who are less fortunate than themselves and who lack education opportunities.

Since praise poetry seeks to re-establish balance where imbalance has come to exist, and to oblige contemporary audiences to follow the good example of their predecessors, Manisi's construction of a magnanimous Matthew Vassar stands as a counterpoint to the excess he identifies in American culture. But there are telling moments of insecurity in the poem. After greeting his listeners he proclaims:

You ask where I'm from:  
I am an African,  
I'm a son of Africa,  
I am a proud African. (290)

That Manisi hailed from Africa was hardly in doubt for his audience. Opland's introduction of his colleague certainly characterised Manisi as an African practitioner of an African form. Manisi begins by highlighting the obvious because he wishes to stress both America's insensitivity to Africa's existence and the importance to his message of his identity as an African representative, even though most of his poetry silences the articulation of proud Africanity and substitutes in its place assertions of African indignity.

If at Taylor Hall Manisi's opening statement of his African identity suggests his concern about how Americans will perceive him, his concluding questions betray his uncertainty about whether his conventional efforts to construct bonds of obligation to which his addressees can be held accountable have any purchase in foreign contexts:

And so today we're at Vassar's home.  
Oh, do you recall the son of Vassar?  
Do you still recall him, Americans?  
Do you recall this man among men,  
whose deeds illumined America,  
so other lands came out to bask?  
Hence Africa's outcasts clamour at these gates. (291)

Manisi's appeal collapses if Americans do not remember and honour, or possess the custom of remembering and honouring, their ancestors. If appropriate ancestors cannot be invoked, or if the practice of invoking the excellent deeds of ancestors fails to infuse Americans with a sense of their obligations, the convention by which

audience and poet tacitly agree to the authority of their inherited duties becomes unavailable to Manisi in America.

Unable to link America to Africa except through broad moral duty, Manisi makes much in his poems of the contrast between American wealth and African poverty, and of America's allegiance with "Western tribes". In his performance at Harvard on 3 March, Manisi calls his audience a "family of sages and heroes", the "lovely homestead of Harvard", but also accuses them of consuming education to excess: "You ate education and ate on until you puked,/ you ate education until your heads bloated" (304). The contrast suggests Manisi's concern with the difference between appearance and its concealed reality of greed. He accuses America of caring only for Western nations: America is "a long stick that reaches the lands of the West/ to keep culture and light burning". Although he identifies his listeners as "children of hosts who share all they have", these hosts only share with European lands – they intervened in "the first German war" and "thrashed the Kaiser", and "again in the war of Hitler". They also attacked Mussolini, and restored order in Europe. Manisi's charge is that America ignores its international duty to Africa by failing to intervene in her desperate affairs to restore justice and balance. In him, Manisi proposes, American audiences face and can no longer ignore this Africa they have snubbed: "Well, now I'm here with you,/ I'm here with you, America,/ I'm here with you, among you" (305).

Central, then, to the poet's representation of Africa's needs is his representation of himself, America's guest. But Manisi's expression of his African identity is fraught with contradiction: on the one hand, he proclaims his pride in being African, but on the other, and essential to his task of winning American support, he asserts the indignity and privation suffered by Africans. At De Maria's dinner party in honour of Manisi, held shortly after his arrival, the poet identifies himself as a grateful tramp from southern Africa:

So then, grateful's the tramp  
from Southern Africa.  
I come from the eastern seaboard  
of Africa's Cape Colony.  
There the great warrior arrived,  
the son of Charles Somerset;  
he crushed us with cannon,  
hounded the Ndlambe to East London,

tucked Ngqika under his arm,  
 yet he wished to milk this Ngqika  
 on the source of South Africa's strength. (274)

Manisi's representation of his, and hence Africa's, poverty and indignity is rooted in the African experience of colonial violence and deceit. Only once in his American poetry, in a short, flat poem for a Vassar class, does Manisi posit a link between Africa and America based on their common experience of British colonialism: he praises his audience as descendants of Washington, "that peerless man,/ who fashioned for the American nation/ independence from the English" (278). The reference is slight and, even though Manisi participates in the myth that his audiences descend from faultless American founders rather than from colonials, he refuses the possibility that Americans might have suffered indignity as a result of English control. This is because, despite his approving references to Washington and Lincoln at Taylor Hall and in later performances, Manisi perceives the American struggle for independence as having created another Western, imperial power, dedicated to furthering Western interests.

Manisi's references to South Africa's violent colonial experience indirectly indict white Americans for their collaboration with Western interests. Despite his reluctance to discuss American racism, Manisi posits a racial bond between Westerners: he refers repeatedly to British colonials as Westerners and whites, and to Americans as Westerners. The implication is that American interests are also directed by the country's white inhabitants to the detriment of its and the world's black peoples. In his Harvard address, for example, Manisi refers to America's willingness to intervene in the concerns of "the lands of the West", and, moments later, to the invasion of Africa by "the Western white with flowing locks" who treated black nations with contempt (305; 306). In a subsequent poem at Berkeley, the poet again invokes treacherous colonial endeavour, and includes his audience in his bitter statement of love for Satan: "How I love someone who loves Satan,/ for Satan's loved by you whites" (311). The Berkeley performance hints at Manisi's sense of America's internally racist character. However, having associated his audience with colonial whites who love Satan, the poet immediately rescues his strategy of appeal to American sympathy by rearticulating a united America:



yet it's a shame things are good in America,  
 for the black and the white blend together:  
 it's shame and disgrace in Africa,  
 for the black is the butt of the white man's derision. (312)

America's shame, Manisi reasserts, lies in her failure to assist African nations so that they too can share in the racial harmony that characterises American society. Manisi heaps a double shame on Africa: the continent is shamed not only by the fact that its internal racism strips its black majority of their dignity, but also by its unfavourable comparison with America, a united polity characterised by equality. The cost of appealing to American sympathy in this way is double: Manisi must conceal his understanding of America's internal politics, and he must portray black Africans as dupes who live in despair.

Manisi's colonial-history cameos, such as that cited above which recounts Charles Somerset's invasion of Ngqika and Ndlambe territory, might indict Americans for their complicity with racist Western endeavours, but they are *intended* as explanations of how Africans have come to suffer as they do. Evidence of unjust colonial violence is meant to inspire American sympathy for the world's mistreated colonised masses. The contradictory ways in which America is represented as being complicit with, and yet separate from, colonial racism suggests the poet's difficulty in articulating a simplified American polity. What the colonial cameos support, however, are Manisi's simplified representations of Africa. His dislike of the task is signalled by the opening words of his Columbia poem:

This dog bites! This dog bites!  
 I clasp your hand, fair Americans.  
 Here's a stranger greeting you:  
 I come from a black continent, I come from a barren land,  
 I emerge from Drakensberg foothills,  
 I emerge from Mathole foothills,  
 mountains snow-capped in winter.  
 Oh the poverty of the land I've left!  
 It's a barren land,  
 it's a blighted land,  
 it's a land of tears,  
 it's a land of death. (301)

Representing himself uncharacteristically as a dog – that begs and bites – Manisi offers a contradictory show of warmth: he clasps the hand he would bite. The

relationship he asserts between himself and his would-be benefactors is distasteful to him; it places him in a position of undignified servility. Reverting immediately to the idea of himself as a stranger, who has no purchase on the help for which he asks, Manisi describes his home landscape. What shocks us, readers of his recorded South African poetry, is the absence of reference in Manisi's American poetry to his land's beauty. The poet is silent about the vitality, humanity, community and topographical diversity of the land he loves; he reveals nothing to his American audience of his pleasure in his country and continent or of his fierce intention to reclaim lost terrain. Such matters preoccupy his domestic representations of home but cannot be imported into a poetry that trades on representations of Africa's reduction to listless poverty and sterility.

Having praised the beauty of his audience at Columbia, Manisi continues:

I'm a destitute from Africa,  
 I'm a son of Africa,  
 I am proud of Africa.  
 What a shame I've nothing to my name:  
 how I wish I were an American  
 so I too could be smart and charming,  
 for the African people wither away,  
 oh the African people starve in their tracks,  
 but oh South Africa's blacks!  
 They're the playthings of power mongers,  
 they're crushed underfoot by the moguls ... (302)

Manisi's assertion of pride in his continent is contradicted by his portrayal of Africans as a withered people, and of South Africa's blacks as weakened playthings who are powerless to retaliate against the might of their oppressors. Indeed, the Africa Manisi describes is one in which pride has given way entirely to indignity and helplessness. It is the image of Africa's utter incapacity for self-help that enables Manisi to plead of his Columbia audience:

Support us men, we're in trouble,  
 please lend us support  
 to free the black in South Africa,  
 please lend us support  
 to inflame the minds  
 of South Africa's blacks:  
 give us the learning Joubert's gang denies us. (302)

The same dynamic is at work in Manisi's performances for the other universities he toured. At Harvard, on 3 March, the poet identifies himself as "an African down to the root":

I come from a land of turmoil,  
 I come from a land of confusion,  
 I come from a land of dissension,  
 but I've nothing to say of South Africa,  
 where a man goes to sleep with water alone  
 and has nothing to drink when he wakes.  
 Here I'm speaking of black people only,  
 mules who toil in the white man's fields

...

I'm a tramp from the Drakensberg mountains,  
 I'm a tramp from the Mbashe and Kei.

...

What a shame we live on a precipice,  
 for we've only our spit to sustain us,  
 for we live in a land of oppression,  
 for we live in a land of suppression. (305)

The power and validity of this characterisation of the black person's plight in South Africa cannot be doubted. Nevertheless, Manisi's representation of blacks as mules and himself as a tramp argue for a complete loss of dignity such as he had never suggested at home. At Berkeley, on 24 March, the poet represents himself as "a vagabond", "a tree stripped of branches/ from a land of oppression" (311). In his unscheduled poem at a dinner party marking the retirement of Alain Renoir who was his host at Berkeley, Manisi declares that he is a pauper, one among "African cripples and beggars" (316). At the Old English Colloquium at Berkeley, to which Manisi had been invited by Renoir, the poet speaks angrily about the black man's emasculation in South Africa: "please go to the black man in Africa,/ for I say no more of South Africa,/ ... the land where blacks get it up the arse" (314). These are extraordinary claims for a poet who customarily insists on the resources of African masculinity and on his own self-possession, pride and dignity. They are extraordinary also as the proclamations of a form so closely associated with manhood, with the construction of proud, impregnable identities.

Indeed, Manisi's claims to an unqualified loss of African dignity as a strategy to win American support seem, in the context of his other recorded poetry, to have

cost the poet considerable personal dignity. He sums up his purpose in selling such representations to his Harvard audience:

So then I report on our people's oppression,  
for we also yearn to eat education,  
to eat and keep it and not puke it up:  
the education we get at home is impoverished (306).

The contrast between Manisi's many vivid, angry references to Africa's literal starvation and his requests for education as sustenance reveals the political timidity at the heart of his academic poetry. In an interview on 12 April 1988 conducted by two of Opland's "Oral Poetry" course students, Manisi revealed his sense of America's complicity with Pretoria:

... I think the powers that be in America are more friendly with the powers that be in Pretoria, and the Americans have industries in South Africa and those industries are paying income tax to the powers that be and at the same time they're paying less wages to the black man, just as the white South Africans do. They are paying less wages to the black man, which I think if those black men were in America would not be paid such wages ... (In Opland 2005: 327-328)

One of the interviewers remarks in response to Manisi's powerful statement that "even if blacks were educated they still wouldn't be paid..." and Manisi interrupts him, "[w]hat we need is that Africans must be educated so that they can have their own industries".

After inquiring into the practical difficulty of how America would assist black education in South Africa without Pretoria's consent, the interviewer asks: "It would take a long time, wouldn't it, to educate everyone?". Manisi's response ends the line of questioning: "But it's better to have something than to have nothing" (328). Manisi's American audiences accepted the poet's claims that black Africans and especially black South Africans were living in a state of intolerable poverty, but they could not accept that the immediate solution to this systemic problem was education. In placing black South Africa in the context of black Africa, Manisi significantly dilutes the urgency of the South African moment, which seemed to be the eve of a civil war. Manisi's American audiences judged his appeals for better education as being inappropriate to the demands of the moment. Adequate education for all

citizens, essential to the health and prospects of any nation, can only be pursued in the context of a political dispensation that allows equal education in principle and policy.

Despite his statement about American industry in South Africa, Manisi never suggests that America withdraw from their African interests and impose sanctions against unjust regimes as a way of forcing change. It is this failure to demand political intervention that bemused Manisi's American audiences, and that remains a troubling silence in the archive. In the next section, I shall show that Manisi was acutely aware that his poetry was being recorded, and that his fear that he might be prevented from re-entering South Africa because of what he had said on the record might explain his focus on a topic like education. But there is another strain in Manisi's poetry that chimes with his response to his interviewer that "it's better to have something than to have nothing" (328): the poet frequently contradicted his fierce exhortations of his audiences by appealing to the truth of fate.

In his poem for the "Transformations of the Word" class at Vassar, Manisi alludes in familiar terms to the mysterious nature of change. He had used the same images in his Transkei independence performances and at Mathanzima's graduation, on both occasions to stress the difficulty of his own speaking conditions as well as the ambiguous state of upheaval he perceived around him. In the Vassar poem, he begins:

I know the earth is powerful,  
yet the sky defeats it,  
for the sky brings drought,  
so rivers and pools dry up.  
Nobody lies like the poet!  
The stones turn to dust but the pools remain. (284)

Despite our certainty about how things will happen, there is another mysterious, elemental agenda at work that determines the order of things. Even the poet cannot be trusted to provide a stable truth. In the same poem, Manisi refers to the struggle between Regan and Gorbachev over nuclear weapons, and to the widely held idea that "they must rip down the webs/ that lie about in the sun to ensnare creation". Dismissing the global political furore over nuclear weapons, however, Manisi argues that man's sense of his potency is out of all proportion to his actual power: Americans and Russians may think they hold creation to ransom, "but creation will last forever/ for it's the creation of the Eternal" (284).

In his poem at Renoir's retirement dinner, Manisi speaks proudly of Xhosa custom and asserts that oppression and death cannot overcome Xhosa community:

No one dies among us Xhosa,  
for the dead join the ranks of those above  
to bring us luck and blessings  
so oppression cannot destroy us.  
So we slaughter a bull to keep a man company  
when we hand him on to our ancestors,  
where he represents us to Qamata. (315)

This moving assertion of faith, of continued belief in luck and blessings, seems to retrieve the dead from the violence and starvation that had marred their lives. But faith, community and tradition figure here as forms of salvation that evade the despair of the African condition Manisi has elsewhere so unequivocally insisted upon to his American audiences. In his performance at Berkeley, on 24 March, Manisi tells his audience:

all things are alike, except for people,  
for people are really perplexed  
by the Divine Wheel's rotation,  
which takes one below and sets him aloft,  
so the lofty turns into the lowly. (311)

Such proclamations work against the idea of political agency, for they suggest that whatever man may think he has achieved, and whatever he works to achieve, it is God with his Divine Wheel who decides how things shall be reordered. Such references undoubtedly constitute a heroic strain in Manisi's poetry since they work for his helpless African in the way that biblical promises work for the elevation of the downtrodden and reviled. This version of heroism depends not on political action, however, but rather on the virtues of faith and endurance.

Indeed, Manisi became increasingly convinced as his corpus of American poetry grew that his plea for help was falling on deaf ears. On 7 April, at the University of Pennsylvania, Manisi proclaimed:

I sing of my defeat,  
a dunce addressing scholars;  
I sing of my defeat,  
for I'm speaking to experts and specialists. (316-317)

The poet addressed an audience at the State University of New York in similar terms:

I'm afraid to talk to my superiors:  
my knees struck each other in fear.  
...  
Their minds blaze like the sun,  
they speak in complex terms I can't understand. (332-333)

Just as Manisi supports his portrayal of a broken African continent by referring to his personal indignity, he implies in these poems that his failure of learning represents the impoverished education offered to Africans. Like himself, Manisi suggests, Africans lack words that will impress educated Westerners. He belies his point with his own eloquence, of course, but underlying his protestations of defeat and inadequacy is the unsaid accusation that, for all their educated words, Americans do not understand their responsibility to those who are denied education.

### **The poet as an ironist**

Manisi's representations of himself as an African and of the African condition (and continent) comprise part of his strategy of shaming Americans into realising their neglect of their international obligations. I have argued that much remains unsaid in Manisi's articulation of a powerless Africa and of America as a unified nation and potential benefactor. The unsaid is occasionally hinted at, and it is the sudden surfacing of what the poet has tried to silence that suggests cracks in his assertions. At the Old English Colloquium at Berkeley, for example, Manisi admits to Africa's beauty and tenacity:

though America's features are lovely,  
Africa's far surpass them,  
yet in Africa people protest,  
so the black makes his way to hell,  
so the white grasps God by the leg,  
hanging on not through ripened intellect,  
but only because he's pale in colour,  
and the black person's directed to hell,  
being a person black in colour  
though yielding nothing to people of intellect. (313)

On this account, it is not their education that privileges white South Africans, and black South Africans are not made unequal to the challenge facing them by their lack of education. The problem is one of systemic racism. It is not specifically one of access to adequate education, the issue to which Manisi has elsewhere confined his demands of Americans. The account exerts pressure on the rest of the poem, which ends with an ambiguous appeal to its audience to “please rise, fellows, and march,/ please go to the black man in Africa” (314). There is no request for the provision of better education, and there is no specific direction as to what Americans should do for “the black man in Africa”.

Because so much is silenced in Manisi’s promotion of a single agenda, contradictions inevitably surface in his poetry and cannot be explained without the disclosures the poet refuses or feels unable to make. To deal with the weight of the unsaid that is inadequately obscured by what *is* said, Manisi represents his identity as a poet in ironic terms. He asserts that the poet is a liar who cannot be trusted. He insists that he has nothing to say, but goes on immediately to say much. He suggests his audience’s collusion in the construction of a subterranean truth: at Harvard, for instance, he claims, “I have nothing to say: you know well what I speak of” (305). And, although he entreats his audiences to follow God’s direction, he repeatedly proclaims his love for Satan. Manisi’s deliberate use of irony and indirection creates space in which he can negotiate the unsaid without giving it voice. What is said in the modes of irony and ambiguity also points to the pressures of political context on Manisi’s conventional poetic freedoms, and key the audience in to ways of interpreting the poet’s enigmatic speech. However, whether they point to the unsaid or urge a re-examination of the conditions in which the said is produced, Manisi’s self-reflexive statements do not cover over the cracks in his vision of the American community he addresses. Commonly understood as either a subversive or a conservative mode, irony is in fact, Linda Hutcheon argues, transideological in nature, useful not only to those who wish to support or oppose a dominant politics, but also to those with divided allegiances (1994: 31).

In *A Pack of Lies*, J. A. Barnes describes fiction as benign untruth and as a form that in fact “constitutes the antithesis of the lie” because it does not deceive its reader (1994: 135). Absence of deception rests on a reciprocal agreement between writer and reader: the writer fabricates a world in his text and readers interpret the



fiction by participating a further act of fabrication. Fiction is understood to be ontologically different from other narrative forms that make claims to factual truth, such as forensic reports or histories. It is conventional, then, for fiction to use stories, or benign untruths, to reveal 'truths'. Praise poetry fabricates by embellishing and expanding its subjects' identities, by telling made-up, illustrative mini-narratives, and reporting fantastical dreams. It commands and is commended for its abundant imagery and enigmatic allusions. Yet, as I have argued, the central conventions governing the form are the poet's licence to speak his mind with impunity and his mandate to reveal truth and to campaign for a just and balanced politics.

More so than in most literary genres, praise poetry is charged with the task of getting at political truth and of articulating authoritative judgements. Manisi's Xhosa audiences expected and knew how to extract truth from the poet's mixture of direct and suggestive statements. In Chapter Three, I cited Opland's contentions that the imbongi "establishes binary oppositions in order to demonstrate how they may be bridged" and that the poet's conventional authority aids him in drawing "his audiences into the forbidding complexities of his poem in order to return them to society improved and enlightened" (1998: 113; 135). Although complexity is a definitive feature of accomplished izibongo, the poet is expected to command the contradictions he highlights. Contrast and opposition should illuminate a coherent message rather than compound obscurity, and should be capable of resolution in listeners' comprehending imaginations. As I argued in Chapter Three, the idea of the imbongi as a central figure, able to provide his audience with analysis and solution, depends on the poet's command of his context and allegiances.

In his performance at Mathanzima's graduation in 1974 and in the second of his poems for Transkei's independence celebrations in 1976, Manisi alerted his audiences to the need to search beneath his words for hidden meanings by asserting that the poet is the worst kind of liar: "Everyone lies, but especially poets". In the last of the independence poems, he went so far as to claim: "One thing we know: there's a jackal here,/ sitting like a shivering chicken". The deceptive chicken is an image both for the 'independent' Transkei and for Manisi's sense of his poetry as speaking praise faintly over sharp criticism. I have argued, however, that Manisi is unable to control the ambiguities and contradictions to which his independence triptych gives expression, and that he does not protect a settled truth beneath his words. The same is true, I suggested in the previous chapter, of his poetry before academic audiences in

South Africa. In 1977, at the Grahamstown festival, Manisi tells his audience that he is speaking sweetly although his words are sour. Performing at the opening of Afrocrafts, the poet seems to praise the gathering of Xhosa women and their white benefactor, but then proclaims, "Well things can lie, but especially poets," and goes on to recount colonial histories of theft and to criticise the event's organiser and display. Repeatedly in his academic poetry at home, Manisi insists on the difference between what appears to be true and what is in fact true – this hidden truth is always inflammatory, unsightly and unsaid. The difference between façade and that which it hides from view provides a trope in Manisi's public career and suggests his sense that truth is never on display and that words cannot reveal truth because they too are a kind of surface: words can be used to mean different things by different people; words promise deeds but do not accomplish action.

In America, Manisi repeatedly asserts that the poet is a liar who masters idle talk. In his poem for his "Transformations of the Word" class on 25 January, Manisi asserts that "[n]obody lies like a poet!" (284). Addressing the "Narrative Writing" students on 25 February, Manisi claims that "[e]veryone lies, but especially poets" (298). In his poem for the 'Politics and Imagination' course, he begins: "Lend us ears so we talk,/ lend us ears so we tell tales ..." and later remarks, "[h]ow nice it is to talk,/ though sometimes a slip brings you down" (296; 297). At a 'Narrative Writing' class, Manisi says, "[i]t's nice to talk but hard to act,/ it's hard to act but easy to talk;/ well everything's nice, but especially talking" (298). And at Renoir's retirement, he begins:

We're talkative people!  
Everyone loves to talk, but especially poets,  
everyone loves to talk, but especially poets,  
everyone talks, but especially poets. (314)

By representing the poet as a liar and his speech as superficial, superfluous and suspicious, Manisi seems to counter the convention that the imbongi's words reveal truth, have weight and are beyond reproach. In one sense, I shall argue below, Manisi wishes to suggest that the conventions of his form are severely limited by the context in which he performs in America. But in another sense, the poet is being ironic. It is not he or his words that are deceitful, but the *addressees* of his poetry and *their* slippery words that deserve suspicion. Manisi felt that if he was to perform his

function as a guardian of truth *and* pursue his strategy of portraying Africa and America as homogenous polities, he would have to address and characterise his audiences in a way that tacitly revealed their deceitfulness while obliging them to act in accordance with their deceptive promises. The words he used to tie his audiences to their founding rhetoric of freedom must also, he felt, be cleansed of their original colonial stain so that they could speak his truth.

Although he calls himself a liar, there is considerable evidence in Manisi's poems that, in his view, he in fact possesses the truth and that it is colonials and Westerners, in which category he includes Americans, who abuse truth for their own profit. In his Harvard poem, Manisi explains the plight of the African by referring to colonial greed and entreats his audience to purchase and retain the truth:

What a shame [black people] are kept from their rights,  
which are eaten by one person alone,  
the Western white with flowing locks,  
who used a musket to enter Africa.

...

Won't you buy the truth, America?  
And once you have it don't sell it again. (306).

The poet provides the truth as he sees it in his description of colonial invasion. It is this truth that America must purchase by helping Africans, but Manisi is suspicious of his American audience – elsewhere, as I have argued, he associates Americans with colonial deceit – and foresees their shabby treatment of truth even if they can be persuaded to “buy” it in the first place.

Responding in much the same way to a Vassar student's query about his ability to improvise as he had replied to Sienaert at the 1985 Durban conference, Manisi castigates white people for their duplicity:

The Western army's really crafty!  
How the whites baffled us;  
...  
they smashed us to smithereens,  
they baffled us, the whites.  
They mastered and made us servants.  
Then we were grabbed and chased to the forests.  
In the forests we broke our spears,  
we fought with axes hacking at trees.  
Suddenly up popped the paper

of the cunning treatysmiths  
who snatched the lion's share of the land. (279-280)

Indigenous people are represented as the trusting dupes of white deceit. Not only were they attacked and defeated, but they were also forced by colonials to cut down the trees of their own forests, forests described elsewhere by Manisi as sacred places of safekeeping. Out of these trees, paper was made so that colonials could write down their claim to a territory that did not belong to them. It is colonials who are liars and Manisi's community that is characterised by innocent honesty.

Manisi signals the lies told by colonial words in his assertions of love for Satan. In the 'Transformations of the Word' class at Vassar, Manisi warns his audience, "[y]ou shouldn't be joking with Satan", yet goes on to claim:

But as for myself, I love Satan,  
for he's worshipped by Christians;  
indeed I love Satan,  
for he's worshipped by nobles;  
I really love Satan,  
for he's worshipped by whites  
who manufacture thunder  
to wipe out the hearts and souls  
of blameless innocents. (284)

In his Berkeley poem on 24 March, Manisi proclaims: "How I love someone who loves Satan,/ for Satan's loved by you whites" (311). Of course, Manisi does not love Satan; he makes it clear in most of his poetry that he is a man of faith who awaits the instruction of the Immanent Maker and his Divine Wheel. His point is that although Christians, nobles, whites, scholars, ministers, chiefs, and "the classy" (338) all claim to love God and to follow his command, their actions belie their words. Manisi wants to use an uncorrupted Christian vocabulary, the surfaces of which correspond to his intentions.

Yet the Christian vocabulary has deceitful origins in Africa and conceals violent histories. We have seen how conflicted Manisi's feelings were about missionaries and their Book. In his many references to God and the darkness that had engulfed Africa before the arrival of God's Word, Manisi accepts afresh what was violently foisted upon his political community. But he wants to reject the agents of words' corruption, and to rescue the truth of God's Word from the words that

colonials used to legitimate their deceitful projects. At the State University of New York, Manisi recounts how Christianity was brought to his society:

We were once a nation of resplendent unity,  
 but throngs of lovely lispers arrived,  
 the missionary bearing the Bible arrived,  
 he said let's bend our knees and close our eyes,  
 and talk to the Creator's I Am.  
 We accepted the Bible and welcomed the Word.  
 Up popped the lovely throngs of Nonibe,  
 leaning on cannon and musket  
 ...  
 Those who love Satan are happy,  
 eating at his table;  
 the white South African's ecstatic,  
 with arms much stronger than Satan's.  
 I guess I'd also love Satan,  
 if I had power and authority... (333)

Colonials and missionaries tainted the Word of God because they used it as a mode of control over Africans when they were really in league with Satan. The statement expands Manisi's abbreviated claims that whites and colonials love Satan. However, Manisi's bitter statement that he too would love Satan if he had power and authority is ambiguous. Is his implicit suggestion that power and authority cannot be won except by deceit? Or is his statement straightforwardly ironic: that is, "I guess I'd also love Satan" actually means that under no circumstances would he consort with Satan? Although, even in this alternative reading, Manisi might still be committed to defeat since power and authority remain linked to evil.

He explains his I-love-Satan trope with greater clarity in his final American poem:

Oh! how I love Satan,  
 for he's loved by Christians;  
 I really love Satan,  
 for he's loved by scholars;  
 I love Satan,  
 for he's loved by the classy.  
 But then again I hate  
 one who loves Satan  
 for being a vicious liar;  
 so I hate one who loves

Satan, for buying the truth  
and selling it off again. (338-339)

Whether Manisi's irony succeeds in purging colonized words of their deceit is debatable: in his Old English Colloquium poem, he asserts that while "the white grasps God by the leg", "the black is directed to hell" so that "[t]he white is happy,/ having seen God;/ the black is wailing,/ playing in the dust with Satan" (314). Manisi's vocabulary here lacks the self-reflexivity of his I-love-Satan trope. If white people nevertheless access God and his promises through their deceit, and black people, despite their faith, go to hell, the colonial vocabulary achieves its veiled intentions. On the other hand, Manisi's frequent recourse to biblical assertions of the inevitability of victory for the downtrodden enables him to evade politics and masks his own divided allegiances, so that even his *own* use of God's Word involves deception.

It is not only words that lie, however. Manisi frequently describes the sights before him as surfaces that conceal nasty depths. The most extreme instance of this strategy is contained in the poet's final American performance at the University of Texas. Disillusioned by this point in his tour, Manisi explicitly expresses his sense that treachery and deceit underlie beauty:

I raise my head! My eyes are open!  
I see lovely people.  
By their looks they seem to be blessed,  
yet we can't be all that certain,  
for the woodborer grinds out the core of sneezewood.  
Under the sun there's turmoil,  
with rock lizards and monitors,  
with murderers and cut-throats,  
with muggers and robbers:  
everyone's sons carry daggers and pangas  
and slash at each other's throats  
...  
So then, I greet you crowds,  
I see handsome men, attractive ladies:  
how pure are your hearts?  
I see eye-catching people:  
do they care about others? (338-339)

Except for its untrue contention that the war raging in South Africa is one of brains and not sticks, Manisi's final American poem is possibly his most successful in that it controls its oppositions, challenges its listeners by interrogating their honesty and intentions, and keeps pulling itself back to the poet's purpose. In the extract above, Manisi characterises himself as an interrogator seeking truths that are buried from sight: he sees his audience's surface beauty and blessedness, but he considers that their appearances may conceal hollowness, impurity and a lack of compassion. He also sees behind the façade they constitute, the violence and disorder that they are helping to conceal by failing to eradicate it from the world.

In the Texas poem, Manisi manages to balance his suspicion of American appearances with appeals to their learning, of which he does see considerable evidence. Having interrogated the reality behind his audience's apparent sympathies, Manisi declares:

So then, I appeal to you,  
with your learning that soars in the sky,  
for your learning's as steep as the sun,  
and it gleams as bright as the moon. (339)

He makes his case convincingly:

We're offered learning by ruffians:  
in offering it they rough us up;  
we're offered learning by paleskins:  
in offering it they restrict it. (339)

In many of his other American poems, however, what Manisi himself conceals prevents him from adequately critiquing the truth of American society hidden behind the apparent beauty of its learned representatives. In part, as I discussed in the first section of this chapter, what Manisi concealed was the chaos of his conflicting feelings about America's internal politics and about Africa as a desperate, scarred yet proud and beautiful continent. This concealment, which cost him much, supported his efforts to make his form's duty-convention work in an alien context in which his demands carried little real weight. The other part of Manisi's concealment, however, stemmed from his feeling that certain truths were not capable of articulation because of the difficulty of his speaking context in America.

In his first American poem at De Maria's dinner party, Manisi explains to his small audience:

Being here in America,  
I've not come to spill our secrets,  
but I've come to speak for Africa  
with justice and balance. (274)

The poet suggests his unease about the expectation he feels Americans have of the information he might divulge about African issues. He appears to be saying that his role as a go-between is a delicate one: in speaking on Africa's behalf to foreign audiences, Manisi does not wish to betray the political community he represents. Yet, in most of his representations of Africa, Manisi does not speak with the balance he claims he will. What he never discloses is the true state of liberation politics: he never mentions banned organisations and he never asks for help for South Africa on behalf of these organisations. This is despite both his previous membership of the ANC and the sympathy with which America appeared to regard ANC exiles.

In an interview with Vassar students, Manisi refuses to discuss the ANC and his association with the organisation even though such insights into the poet's politics would help to dispel the rumours (stirred up, ironically, by ANC exiles) that he is in league with Pretoria. Asked whether he is still involved with the organisation, Manisi responds: "The ANC is banned. Don't forget there's no ANC. ... So then let us not talk about the ANC or what" (in Opland 2005: 330). Later in the same interview, Manisi is asked to clarify the reasons for the exiles' negative attitudes towards him. Some of the pressures and contradictions of Manisi's speaking contexts are revealed by the necessity of mentioning the ANC in his response: "Well, I just don't know. I cannot say why. But what I know I have just heard that there are people here working with the ANC movements somewhat underground, but here they are working openly. Well, for me to say that there is ANC in South Africa now ...". Opland records that Manisi trails off because he is "too polite to explain that he cannot possibly run the risk of compromising himself on his return to South Africa. It is different for exiles" (2005: 330). Explaining why Manisi's discussions of his texts' meanings are guarded, Opland claims the poet "knew that the South African government had long ears" (2005: 307).



In South Africa, academic tape recorders represented to Manisi the opportunity of addressing a benign record that would preserve his texts for future receivers. In America, however, the academic context was overtly political, pressured by the accusations made by black exiles and the confusion among students about what Manisi's political credentials and affiliations really were. The South African government had taken considerable time in providing Manisi with travel documents that would allow him to travel to America. Aware of how closely Pretoria guarded its secrets, Manisi felt as though he was under constant surveillance by government spies while he was abroad. In such circumstances, the video camera and tape recorders that captured his poetry took on an ominous quality for Manisi. At Harvard, he claims: "I have nothing to say: you know well what I speak of,/ I'd have more to say if I were at home" (305). Ironically, Manisi feels he has more freedom to speak his mind at home than he has in free America.

The constraints on his speech were frustrating for Manisi. At Berkeley, he tells his audience:

One day I might bring good things to you,  
but today as I speak I am troubled:  
I'm a son with no place of his own.  
As I speak my neck is throttled:  
they say I'm spilling the beans,  
but the poet has always had the right  
to expose a man screwing another man's wife. (312)

Manisi's acknowledgement that he has no place of his own is not simply a statement of his material dispossession but suggests the absence of a space in which he can speak truth freely. He feels as he speaks that others are accusing him of treachery. And yet he is angry that such accusations should scare and contain him because it is his right as a poet to speak without fear of reprisal even the most painful and contentious of truths. His statement reveals the fact that his lying trope is not merely an ironic strategy; he is forced to lie by political circumstances in which his poetic privileges are not acknowledged.

In a poem for a Vassar class, Manisi articulates in deeply moving terms his desire to speak freely:

I have nothing to say: I didn't come to tell tales,  
 but I have a wish, so I drop a hint,  
 I will speak out one day,  
 I will speak out in blazing light,  
 I will speak out so mountains tumble,  
 I will speak out so oceans rage.  
 Greetings men and ladies.  
 I greet you! I zip my lips and sit!! (297)

Manisi believed in his own power and talent as a poet. Opland recalls the poet's claim, in response to a question from a Vassar student, that, "through his poetry he brought down the sky" (Opland 2005: 286). At Pennsylvania, Manisi urges his audience:

train your ears: this thudding's the piercing thunder  
 of Thatho's African territory.  
 His voice tumbles mountains and smothers springs.  
 here's the pouncer rolling words off his tongue,  
 striding out as if he's doling out land ... (317)

This is the voice Manisi wants his audience to hear but although he entreats them to hear it, he knows they cannot, because he feels compelled by the politics surrounding his visit to check his critical assertions. But I have argued that another reason why this voice cannot be heard is that the poet has silenced it: "the piercing thunder/ of Thatho's territory" would undermine Manisi's construction of himself as a representative of Africa's mute helplessness. Where the powerful voice surfaces in the Pennsylvania poem, threatening to assert African pride and power and to reveal truth, it is immediately smothered beneath Manisi's reassertion of African dispossession and of the necessity of his own silence:

Here's the pouncer rolling words off his tongue,  
 striding as if he's doling out land,  
 though he owns nothing but his name,  
 for in Africa all blacks are destitutes  
 without any land of their own.  
 I've nothing to say of South Africa ... (317)

Because of the layers of political complexity that silenced him, and the competition in his performances between suppressed truths and the partial truth that supported his efforts to engage American duty, Manisi worried that his American

audiences knew too little about him and his form to interpret his subterranean messages as he hoped they would. In order for them to make irony happen in Manisi's lying-poet and I-love-Satan tropes, the audience would have to constitute an appropriate discursive community. Both Stanley Fish and Linda Hutcheon argue that it is not the case that irony creates communities, as previous commentators have suggested, but rather that already constituted discursive communities make irony happen by attributing irony to texts (Fish 1989: 194-195, Hutcheon 1994: 89-115). If Manisi's audience did not fully grasp the convention that the poet is a truth-teller, the poet's intended irony in his poet-as-liar claims does not "happen": it merely perplexes. It even, perhaps, increases the level of distrust between poet and audience.

Addressing this concern on 25 February in his poem for the "Narrative Writing" class at Vassar, Manisi asks his audience:

What people are these with patience  
to seek the truth about what they don't know?  
Everyone lies, but especially poets!  
Will you trust me, since you don't know?  
Will you trust me, since you don't sense?  
For the poet speaks in utter obscurity. (298)

His is an inexperienced audience whom he asks to trust him despite his assertion of his own deceitfulness. Yet Manisi knows even as he tests his listeners' ability to decode his lying trope that he "speaks in utter obscurity" and that they must fail to grasp his meaning.

### **The poet as a beggar**

I have argued in this chapter that Manisi tried to address his wealthy American audiences on the subject of their moral obligation to Africa's desperate black inhabitants. Although Manisi claimed to speak for Africa, his principal concern was with South Africa's black community. While there are moments in which Manisi seems to suggest the need for greater action than the negotiation and learning he recommends, he confines his explicit demands of Americans to the subject of education. Manisi's American poetry yields several lengthy and complex texts that are rich in imagery and complexity and explosive in their contained sentiments, but it is a poetry that conceals more than it says and deliberately refuses truths that it might

articulate. I have argued that Manisi's use of irony opens up a space for him, in which he tries to restore integrity and 'truth' to words that his politics relies upon but that have been appropriated and sullied by colonial and Western interests. However, the idea of the poet as a liar also points to the considerable limitations on Manisi's conventional freedoms in America. Irony happens *to* Manisi in this sense: whereas in South African academic contexts, the poet's assertions were immobilised by the depoliticised nature of his immediate speaking conditions, in America, Manisi's contexts were, in his view, overly politicised. He did not fear that his audiences might fail to regard his purpose as political, but that they (particularly potential government spies) would interpret his poetry in the light of preconceived ideas about his politics.

As we have seen, education and negotiation were Manisi's official solutions to South Africa's problems. The armed struggle, which he rejected because of the indignity he felt violence visited on its perpetrators, was a strategy that traded on the resources of black pride, strength and resolve that, in America, Manisi denied his people had. In previous chapters, I have argued that when he performed at home in front of black audiences, Manisi's ideal of non-violent resistance was often submerged beneath a tide of urgent exhortations to his listeners to regain their ancestral land. Even though he never explicitly encouraged violent behaviour and frequently urged black audiences to educate themselves so that they could become dignified, wise leaders of a regained land, the force of his black nationalism and its vocabulary of seizure often seem to suggest violent reclamation.

Part of the problem with Manisi's appeal for American intervention in South Africa's education system, was that education reform depends on government policy. In his Mathanzima poetry, Manisi often associates education with a loss of tradition, although his indictments against Western education are countered in his South African academic poetry by his expressions of desire for missionary education, which, he claims, brought light to Africa. Nevertheless, he infrequently appealed to his black audiences to educate themselves more effectively because he knew that they had no control over the quality of the education they received. He knew that any attempt to register official displeasure with Bantu education, such as the Soweto uprising of 1976, was likely to meet with swift and violent retaliation from government.

Accordingly, Manisi strove to encourage pride in his black audiences based on their African identity, while lobbying his white audiences to demand change from their white government. That white South Africans should demand equal education

for their black countrymen seemed to Manisi to be a legitimate and forceful demand: he had identified the dual education system as yet another way in which white South Africa perpetuated colonial rule. Americans did not share Manisi's national problematic, however. In order to connect his audiences to the African plight, Manisi sought to appeal to their sympathy and their guilt over their grossly disproportionate happiness and wealth in comparison to Africa's unmitigated hopelessness and poverty. I have argued that a degree of deceit, certainly of manipulative strategy, was involved in the poet's portrayal of the two political communities at the centre of his conflicted address.

Manisi's problem was that he did not really see America as the potentially beneficent donor nation that his oversimplified representation of his audience's national heritage suggested. In his Pennsylvania poem, Manisi mounts a bitter case against Americans:

Greetings then, lovely American family,  
 Washington's homestead and Lincoln's,  
 men who made America  
 supreme among all other nations.  
 Today all Western nations  
 trust in you, America,  
 but what a disgrace, Americans,  
 – oh your indifference –  
 with the learning you ate till you puked,  
 just watching the black in South Africa  
 made the butt of derision!  
 Of course, we expect you to do so,  
 for whites are accustomed  
 to lick each other,  
 for you keep your wealth to yourself;  
 though you seem to blame one another  
 you're just pulling the wool over watchers' eyes. (317)

Manisi's efforts to construct an American duty to virtuous founders who spoke of freedom and equality unravels here in his resort to a comparison between American and South African racism. In an interview with a Vassar student, as we have seen, Manisi argued astutely that, "Americans themselves have industries in South Africa and those industries are paying income tax to the powers that be and at the same time they're paying less wages to the black man, just as white South Africans do" (In Opland 2005: 328). Although his statement marries American interests with those of

white South Africans, Manisi never explicitly identifies American interests as the interests of white Americans. The inconsistency arises because of Manisi's failure to address in his American poetry and interviews the problem of America's internal racism. Instead, as I argued above, Manisi tried to tie Americans to the promise of their founding political ideals so that, in his Pennsylvania poem, his sudden attack against American indifference as in fact masking a deep-rooted racism seems to dismantle the set of ancestral obligations he has tried to construct. Certainly, the claim that black people expect white people, including white Americans, to band together against them, destroys the impression Manisi has tried to create elsewhere that Americans are suitable benefactors because they "[expel] unfairness and difference/ based on colour and bigotry" (302), and settles rather into the bitter comfort of fatalism.

Manisi's unwillingness to interrogate America's racism explicitly makes it impossible for him to suggest that America and South Africa are similar rather than exactly opposite polities. Indeed, his strategy compels him to talk of two homogenous and absolutely different communities: the American political community, characterised by justice and equality, and the African political community, characterised by the unjust and unequal rule of colonial foreigners. In silencing his sense of America's complicity with racism, even if he articulates their role in the imperial enterprise, Manisi sacrifices the real connection between America and Africa. He tries to insert truth into the international economy in which Americans can purchase help for Africa, but the global scene is too large a place for the imbongi of the nation. Americans can only be criticised in this context for their indifference towards and their neglect of foreigners. Manisi's repeated return to colonial histories suggests his repressed desire to implicate Americans in deceitful, violent and active incursions that can be used forcefully to secure duty.

In his poem for Alain Renoir, Manisi expresses his desire for connection with his American audiences. He says of Renoir:

If you were a stranger from Africa  
 I'd smear you with ochre, set beads on your ankles  
 so you stab right and left when you walk.  
 An ivory armband's established in custom  
 as a gift to a man who brings honour.  
 No one dies among us Xhosa,  
 for the dead join the ranks of those above

to bring us luck and blessings  
 so oppression cannot destroy us.  
 So we slaughter a bull to keep a man company  
 when we hand him on to our ancestors,  
 where he represents us to Qamata.  
 Here are your country's sons and daughters  
 giving you an ivory armband,  
 for you're a man of deeds,  
 who taught his children and nation,  
 till he taught their children in turn,  
 more and more and ever more.

...

It's a pity the experts eat alone here,  
 eat and chew learning and swallow it  
 and don't pass the plate, though others still hunger.  
 It's a sin to be stingy, a blessing to give:  
 though your portion is small, toss out a scrap,  
 share with paupers like the Manisis,  
 African cripples and beggars. (315-316)

The political community Manisi most truly represents is that comprised by his Xhosa countrymen. It is their customs and modes of exchange that he knows intimately. If Renoir were Xhosa, Manisi asserts, this is how his community would treat him. But Renoir is not Xhosa: the customs Manisi cherishes are not Renoir's, nor do they belong to Renoir's American community. Although a comparison can be made between Xhosa ivory armbands and American accolades, the analogy is one of words and has little substance in truth. Indeed, the African community Manisi represents does not, in his spiritual understanding, require connection with foreign lands of the earth. The Xhosa are self-sufficient: their oppression shall be overcome by their own custom, according to which their dead represent them to God, who will inevitably grant reward to the downtrodden. Despite Manisi's strategy of irony and indirection, his resort to fate, his silences and his failures of truth deny the firmer bonds he might have constructed between his home community and his American audiences. What binds his compromised versions of America and Africa in the earthly interregnum of politics is nothing more than the African beggar: Manisi himself.

## Conclusion

The archive of David Manisi's izibongo is substantial: it comprises more than forty taped and transcribed performances, five books, an unpublished manuscript, and a set of retrieved newspaper contributions. In addition, the Opland Collection houses recordings and transcripts of interviews with Manisi conducted by Opland and by various American students. The complete archive, from first newspaper poem to final academic performance, spans a period of forty-one years. Yet, as with all such academic collections, there are many gaps in Manisi's performance career that the archive is unable to supply. We know nothing, for example, about Manisi's performance poetry of the late 1950s and the 1960s. We do know that in the first part of this period he was the secretary of the ANC's Queenstown branch and that he performed as an imbongi at local ANC meetings. However, in what terms he characterised his listeners and crafted his political messages for them, we shall never discover. After the ANC's banning and Manisi's detention by East London authorities, the poet returned to his home in Transkei and appeared occasionally at events of importance to his local community and chief, Mathanzima. How Manisi understood his return to the rural polity in those years or his role as an occasional poet of the chief he had left a decade earlier, we can only guess from the few recordings of the poet's Transkei performances which the archive supplies for 1974 and 1976.

The poems available to us suggest a career of struggle with the question of how to reconcile the political communities envisaged by his ANC audiences of the late 1950s and his rural, chief-subjects of the 1960s. The gap in the archive is significant. Yet, what we have indicates starkly the contradictions in Manisi's political vision. I have argued in this dissertation that, in spanning the apartheid period, Manisi's poetry reflects the increasingly compromised and compromising discourses and contexts in which the rural imbongi operated. Manisi was constrained not only by censorship legislation, but also by the perversion of the institutions his poetry cherished and by the appropriation of discourses of rural identity by the apartheid state. I have argued that the urban-led resistance struggle responded to Pretoria's language of belonging by speaking in terms of black-nationalist and pan-African unity and renouncing localised categories of 'ethnic' or 'tribal' identity. The poet of the chieftdom, essentially a poet of the local polity, was marginalised by the black struggle and compromised by his distorted vocabulary.



Manisi acknowledged the bind in which he was forced to operate by referring to the poet as a liar. Opland suggests in the concluding chapter of *The Dassie* that we can understand the ambiguity and contradictions in Manisi's poetry by thinking of the poet as a trickster (2005: 351-352). According to Robert D. Pelton, whom Opland quotes, "[t]rickster-like, Ananse speaks the truth by dissembling it ... Somehow, his slipperiness fulfils the nation's need for healthy commerce between what is above and what is below ..." (Pelton 1980: 2). "... [T]he trickster is a figure of the margins and yet somehow of the centre ..." (Pelton 1980: 3). Opland draws also from Victor Turner's account of the trickster figure: Ananse "rejects truth in favour of lying, but only for the sake of speech ..." (Turner 1967: 51); "He is a living connection between the wild and the social, between the potentially and the actually human ..." (1967: 351). Turner argues that we should "see the trickster as a symbol of man imagining his world in its daily joining of opposed experiences" and as "the image of that yearning – that driving energy of inclusion which is itself an image of final boundlessness – which sets the social order in motion and keeps it spinning, which holds heaven and earth in balance, which names the nameless and speaks the unspeakable" (1967: 261; 283-284). The trickster, then, articulates contradiction in order to express human wholeness. Opland suggests that this is what Manisi was doing in asserting that he was a liar. I have argued, however, that the contradictions that pervade Manisi's poetry testify not to the poet's articulation of a boundless world but to his entrapment in a polarised and strictly bounded context. This "driving energy of inclusion" was powerfully present in his poetry's calls to unity. However, it was contested by Manisi's other, reactionary vocabulary of exclusive identity and by his frequent eruptions of anger and frustration before white audiences. It is on the contest in Manisi's poetry between inclusive and exclusive political communities that I shall focus in concluding this dissertation.

### **Land and political community**

Manisi's poetry attests to the intimate connection between land and political community. I have argued that the poet's account of the colonial encounter ties the degradation of the traditional polity and its venerable institutions of rule to the loss of territory. The poet's powerful assertions of the unjust seizure of Xhosa land by colonials, construct a historical Xhosa nation, the 'tribes of Phalo', that has claim in

the present. It is this dispossessed Xhosa nation and its dispossessors, 'tribes of Nonibe' and 'Joubert's tribes', that comprise the exclusionary political communities of Manisi's poetry. The poet's desire that Xhosa territory should be regained for the Xhosa nation contends with his desire for a non-racial South African polity in which resources are shared, and marks his poetry as a specifically rural, eastern Cape literature. In South Africa's southeast, the memory of the colonial encounter is long and vivid – it was in this region that the subcontinent's earliest prolonged and violent contact with white foreigners occurred. That Manisi's apartheid poetry identifies the roots of injustice in colonial invasion emphasises the poet's physical and intellectual location in that expanse of land over which nine frontier wars and countless skirmishes were waged.

One of the main claims of Manisi's poetry is that the Xhosa are destined according to Divine justice to reclaim their land. Under colonial governments, the powers of chiefs were curtailed: one of the most important functions wrested from their control, was that of land distribution. Colonial authorities provided inadequate parcels of land to families who were permitted to occupy, but not to alienate or enlarge, their designated plots. As Lungisile Ntsebeza remarks, "... the system was neither communal ... nor individual" (2000: 287). Although apartheid governments 'reinstated' chiefs and gave traditional authorities significant power in allocating land, it remained the case that neither chiefs nor rural communities owned the land they occupied. As paid government employees, corrupt traditional authorities frequently exacted taxes and other fees from their constituents in return for permission to occupy land. Ntsebeza summarises: "... land in the rural areas of the former Bantustans during the period from colonialism to apartheid was state land" (2000: 289). Chiefs' management of land according to apartheid design did much to damage the legitimacy of the chieftaincy among those living under rural administration. It also contributed significantly to the demise of sacred unity between land, community and chief.

The way in which colonial and apartheid regimes conceived of the division, ownership and administration of land contrasts sharply with the model of land occupation and affiliation that operated in pre-colonial times. Hammond-Tooke argues that because of the variegated landscape of the coastal littoral occupied by the northern and southern Nguni, people lived in largely self-sufficient communities (1993: 15). Society was relatively decentralised and 'democratic', and chiefs infrequently intervened in a household's relationship to the land it occupied. Manisi's

desire for the return of Xhosa land to its rightful heirs can be understood not only as a response to the specific dispossessions effected by successive colonial and apartheid regimes, but also as a deep yearning for the autonomous spaces and lifestyles of a lost past. That Manisi cherished a romanticised vision of a just and unified pre-colonial society is evident especially in his fieldwork poems. Yet, the poet's construction of a corporate Xhosa nation that might assert ownership over its reclaimed land refuses the historical reality that no such entity existed prior to colonialism. That Manisi can address his Transkei audiences as members of the Xhosa nation, that he can supply Xhosa ancestors to Thembu identities suggests his internalisation of a form of political community that was created in response to, and partly by, colonial conceptions of nation. Modern Xhosa identity, forged in the colonial encounter, is thus part of a world that can no longer be separated out or reversed into the territories of Manisi's desire. The poet acknowledges and tries to work with this complicated and compromised truth, but he also yearns for the beautiful lie of pre-colonial national unity and liberty. The circumstances in which Manisi performed and wrote, which have been the focus of this dissertation, explain the contradictions at the heart of his poetry. Manisi sought escape from the complexities of, and personal sacrifices required by, the multicultural reality in the very terms that Pretoria had appropriated: it was the homeland programme that promised decolonisation of African territory, and apartheid rhetoric that spoke of self-determination for South Africa's African nations.

### **Africa and academics**

Manisi's South African academic poetry evidences the ease with which his conciliatory appeals for equal education, shared national resources and *ubuntu* were displaced by his anger with his white audiences' colonial ancestry and participation in apartheid. The poet's American corpus reveals his difficulty in speaking freely in a foreign land in which black exile politics intensified the polarised conditions of Manisi's home context. Both sets of academic poetry frequently resort to the construction of exclusionary political communities: in South Africa, Manisi asserts Xhosa land claims and national identity against white colonial claims and identities, and in America, he contrasts a uniform black Africa of poverty with a homogenous (and implicitly white) America of selfish wealth. After Manisi returned home from America, he attended a conference in Durban at which he performed two izibongo:

the last of his career. In the first of the two poems, he finally connects Africa to America by referring to that which he had avoided in America: the African-American civil rights struggle. He asserts:

Here is Africa shaking;  
Here is Africa struggling like America;  
She bobs and she kicks.  
Once she stood tall and strong,  
Untamed in her pride, now laid low.  
Young Luther King traversed the self-same course;  
But today we look to this fellow  
Named Jesse Jackson, a strapping youth with African roots.  
America may view him as a bastard;  
But Africa does not share the sentiment. (359)<sup>1</sup>

Africa, in this construction, is a black continent engaged in a single struggle. America is a white continent: it rejects Jackson because his roots are African. Although the political communities articulated are large and continental, they are also exclusive and racial in character.

This was not the note on which the poet ended his career, however. In the second of the Durban poems, Manisi addresses his academic colleagues with a challenge that recognises the reality of multicultural coexistence in a country of unequally distributed means. He speaks at first to the Principal of the University, Professor P. Booysen:

Desiring to gather together the peoples of Africa south,  
Will your efforts overcome this southern Africa's problems?  
You dare concern yourself with Africa's longstanding concerns.  
I direct your attention to Nigeria,  
I turn your attention to Ethiopia.  
You bring together the Ngongongo and the Swahili,  
You bring together the Nguni and the Sotho.  
All these peoples! Did you, at all, anticipate stumbling blocks?  
In saying this – hapless one  
Who moves forward determinedly  
Like the secretary bird hunting for reptiles –  
Here then are your countrymen:  
Here are intensely energetic whites;  
Also present are blacks distinguished in their own right.  
Here too are womenfolk of all colours.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers for poems and extracts from poems refer to their location in Opland 2005. These are Manisi's translations, which have been reproduced in *The Dassie*.

Let the constellations be distributed!  
 We do meet in this Durban often.  
 Oh! What will be the result?

...

You discuss custom and hold forth on language.  
 Who does benefit from your deliberations?  
 For this race is at a loss.  
 Having dissected and unpacked folktales who does benefit?  
 You analysed and interpreted the traditions  
 Who will then enjoy the fruits thereof?  
 Be it so, I'm not complaining

...

Go on exercising your critical faculties –  
 For your minds, full of knowledge, are primed already:  
 They distinguish between the stars and the sun;  
 But then the light shed turns to shine on you  
 While Africa lies straddled in the shade.  
 She needs to be retrieved, fellows.  
 Hold hands together gingerly  
 And stand together firmly  
 Bringing black and white Africa together  
 Set to apportion the rights equitably.  
 I disappear!! (360-361)

The poet's involvement with academics revealed not only his anger at white privilege but also his desire to be a dignified, educated member of university communities. Although on the one hand, Manisi's academic career implies the declining performance opportunities available to him in his local Transkei contexts, on the other, the poet's involvement in academic contexts enabled him to create durable texts for the record and to struggle with those of his countrymen who provoked him most. It is in these communities of learning that Manisi sees opportunity to educate South Africans about their mutual duties. The final poem of Manisi's career challenges academics to apply their study to the ends of national reconciliation, and returns to the idea of unity based on working to resolve the divisive but shared national problematic. The Africa that lies straddled in darkness while the light of knowledge and acclaim shines on academics might be a black continent, but there is also an Africa to be retrieved that accommodates unity between its black and white inhabitants. This concept of retrieval is different from that which seeks a return to a lost time of Xhosa autonomy; indeed, the retrieval of an Africa in which rights are equitably distributed among black and white Africans is not a retrieval of polity – for no such polity has yet existed, according to Manisi's poetry – but a retrieval of humanity.

### Manisi's literary legacy

I have argued in this thesis that in the face of considerable obstacles to his literary expression as mandated by the conventions of his genre, Manisi was innovative and determined: when his reading public slipped beyond his reach, he crafted texts for future audiences that would be preserved in the pages of books. Although he compromised his political principles in writing *Inkululeko*, which removed the ambiguity of his 'independence' poetry by asserting support for Mathanzima and Transkei, Manisi also produced historical poems for Opland's fieldwork that were intended to reveal to future audiences their roots in a proud and redemptive past. The poet's address of the record (and thereby the future) was an ingenious attempt to escape the constraints of his contemporary speaking and writing conditions. But his archived texts are never free of the overriding complexity of the contexts in which they were created. I have argued that local contexts of creativity do not exist in isolation from the macro social context: especially in the context of national oppression and struggle, the local is a particular negotiation of and contribution to the larger space in which discourses and identities are contested. In all his izibongo, Manisi had to contend with the contradictions in his political vision and with the difficulty of speaking in discredited terms. It is partly for the struggles they reflect that Manisi's poems remain valuable as reflections of the ways in which fluid South African identities easily break down into rival particularities.

Perhaps, however, now that the crude polemics of oppression and struggle have collapsed beneath the complexities and pragmatics of post-apartheid life, we can read the archive of Manisi's poetry in ways that liberate it, to some extent, from its own contortions and furies. In reading Manisi's maps of Xhosa belonging and right, we might see them as traces of an historical and physical geography, the erased grooves of which still furrow the multiply redrawn national map. Contemporary readers, those for whom Manisi longed, might release the poems from their overriding political prerogatives and allow them to testify to a range of identities: human, divine, national, regional and, to the river or valley or mountain, specifically local. Such readers might acknowledge the compromises and ambiguities involved in each of the Mathanzima poems, and yet marvel at the plenitude, enigma and promise that characterises the human subject. Assessing the contribution of the Xhosa literary

tradition from Ntsikana and Makana to prominent political writers like Biko and Mandela, Chapman argues that,

the common characteristic is a revindicated humanism which holds its broad enlightenment to the account of the particular, local cause. At its most pertinent, it is marked creatively by both the Westernism of school people and the Africanism of Red people. We may identify this as the 'Xhosa legacy' in a general history of South African literature. (1996: 110-111).

Even though it fails on several occasions to assert the complex individuality of many of its challenging academic subjects, Manisi's poetry invites us repeatedly to see izibongo as a genre centred on the revived human and the re-imagined political community.

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